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INJUN DICK;

OR,

The Death Shot of Shasta.

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AUTHOR OF "THE SPOTTER DETECTIVE," "THE NEW
YORK SHARP," "OVERLAND KIT," "ROCKY
MOUNTAIN BOB," "KENTUCK, THE SPORT,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DEATH ON A PALE HORSE.

THE snow had melted on the sierra's sides, and the Shasta river, swollen high above its usual bounds, came rushing madly toward the north, its water hurrying onward like a frightened, guilty thing fearing pursuit.

No sun had shone that day upon the Shasta valley, and the little two-horse hack, the express between Yreka and the mining town known as Cinnabar City, had wound its way up the bank of the river beneath a leaden sky.

The chill air of winter still lingered in the far northern valleys although the spring was well advanced.

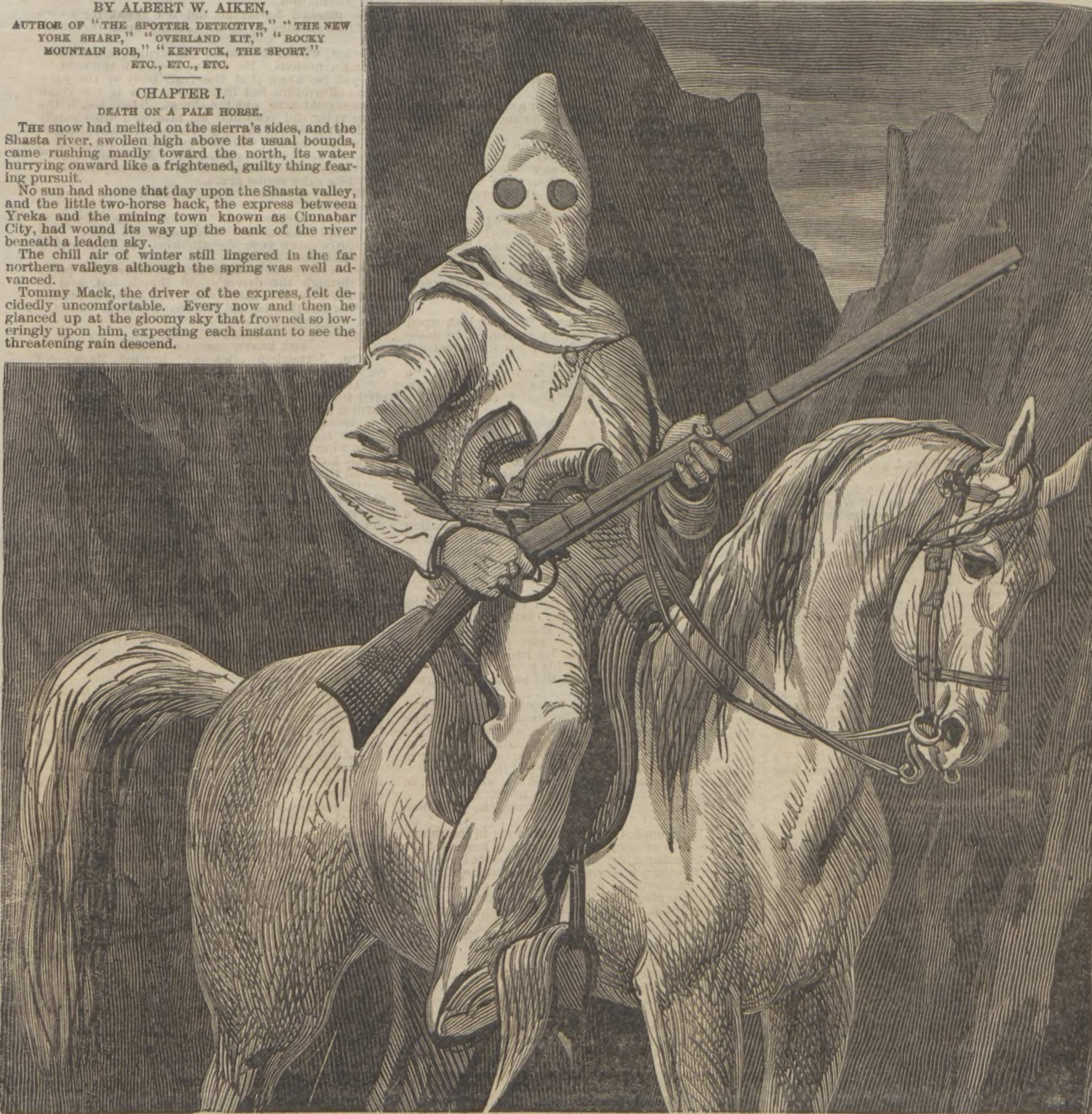
Tommy Mack, the driver of the express, felt decidedly uncomfortable. Every now and then he glanced up at the gloomy sky that frowned so loweringly upon him, expecting each instant to see the threatening rain descend.

But the storm held off, and at just twelve precisely Tommy halted the coach at Scotch Bend, where the half-way house, known as Mac Ilvaine's Ranch, was situated.

Mack threw the reins to the hostler, who ran out with the fresh steeds, for the horses were always changed at Scotch Bend, and descended from the

box in a way which clearly indicated that he did not feel easy in his mind.

Mac Ilvaine, a sturdy, redheaded Scotchman, was on hand to receive his guests as usual, for at his ranch the passengers took dinner, and he instantly noticed the peculiar expression upon the face of the usually light-hearted driver, and so, without paying



any attention whatever to the passengers in the coach, he immediately rushed up to Mack.

"Hey, mon, what's broke?" Mac Ilvaine inquired, speaking with a good, broad Scotch accent.

"Nothin' in 'ticular, pard," responded the driver, but without relaxing the solemnity of his visage. "Thar's two pilgrims in the hearse; let 'em out for fodder," and Mack nodded to the hack.

Mac Ilvaine instantly obeyed. He opened the door of the hack and sung out:

"Twenty minutes for dinner!"

A portly middle-aged man, well dressed, and a delicate, lady like girl, attired in a neat traveling-suit, descended from the hack and entered the dining-apartment of the ranch.

"Come, mon, they're at table," the host said, addressing the driver, who had remained by the fore-wheel of the hack, apparently watching the harnessing of the fresh horses, but with a face as stolidly set as a statue's.

"I'm werry much obleeged to you, ole man, but I reckon this hoss don't want nary feed this time," Mack replied, gravely.

The host was astonished; the idea of serving dinner without the presence of the driver, the monarch of the road, was something perfectly awful.

Mac Ilvaine opened his mouth to remonstrate, but the driver cut him short.

"I 'pass' this time, pardner; go it 'alone,' and give the pilgrims a show for their money."

The host of the ranch was too well acquainted with the despotic humor of the veteran Mack, to attempt to argue him out of his resolution, so he went in and ordered his wife to serve the dinner; but as soon as it was on the table the Scotchman came out again, for his curiosity was excited to learn the reason for Mack's strange behavior.

The driver had taken a seat upon a bowlder close to the edge of the river, and with a huge bowie-knife was whittling a little branch which he had picked up, and as the chips fell upon the surface of the troubled waters, he watched each and every one as though his life depended upon it.

Mac Ilvaine came up softly and sat down upon a bowlder a yard or so from the driver.

Mack did not seem to notice the approach of the keeper of the shanty, so the canny Scotchman drew a flask from his pocket, uncorked it, and passed it over to Mack.

The driver silently seized it, wiped the muzzle with his sleeve, and then took a good long drink. Passing the flask back to the Scotchman, Mack fixed his yellow-gray eyes full upon him, and, in a melancholy sort of whisper, asked:

"Do you believe in spir'its, ole man?"

Mac Ilvaine started at the question, then he scratched his head thoughtfully for a moment, and then he reluctantly admitted that the conundrum was too much for him, and that he gave it up.

"I never did afore to-day; but now, pardner, I chips in," the driver said, solemnly.

"Ha! you speered a sper't, mon?" exclaimed the keeper of the ranch, in utter astonishment.

"Watch me while I lay out the cards," replied Mack, with uplifted fore-finger. "Sharp and early at seven o'clock this hyer mornin' I lit out from Yreka, the span of bays to the hearse an' two pilgrims inside, old Yorker, the new landlord of the Occidental Hotel at Cinnabar, and a niece of his'n, from the East, I hearn. Wal, the bays were frisky an' we did the furst three miles or so in slap-up style; then, as we clim' the rise, jes' this side of Little Pine creek, I heered the sound of a hoss's hoofs a-gallopin' arter us. Nothin' strange 'bout that, you know, only that I kinder expected to see the hossman jine our funeral arter a time, 'cos of course it stood to reason that a single nag could beat the time of my hearse. Wal, now, jes' keep your eye onto this pint. All the time, as I driv' on, I could hear them air hoofs a-patterin' down onto the road, but they never came nigher and they never sounded further off. Now, ole man, take a pull at your Scotch wool, an' spit out what you think of it."

"Why, a traveler, weel behind ye," Mac Ilvaine answered.

"An' whar is he?" demanded Mack, doggedly, waving his hand toward the road. "Why doesn't he put in an appearance? Hyer's the road an' thar's the shanty by it. Whar's the stranger? Whar's the hoss that has galloped 'bout half a mile behind me from Yreka hyer, never gittin' nigher an' never gittin' further?"

The Scotchman shook his head; again the question was too much for him.

"Ole man, I driv' ag'in' a galoot onc't on the lower road from Shasta, northward," the driver said, in a solemn tone. "He could ride, he could, but drive, nary time. I bu'sted him an' he quit. He went an' killed himself like a gentl'man, an' I helped to 'plant' him. Pard, that poor cuss has risen outen his grave an' has been a-follerin' me this day."

The Scotchman gaped at the driver, wonderstruck; he was amazed at the belief of the veteran, but was not at all convinced of the truth of his story.

"Hoot, mon, I ken you're dreamin'!" he exclaimed.

"Ole man, ef I didn't feel kind o' solemn-like, I'd jes' pile in an' whale you!" Mack retorted, shaking his head in warning.

"Oh, gang awa'!" cried the Scotchman, in contempt. "I ken that sper'ts dinna ride on hosses."

"The hoss is a spook, too, you ole mutton-head!" exclaimed Mack, indignantly.

"I wana believe it, till I see it with my ain two eyes!" the Scotchman replied, incredulously.

"But I did see it!" the driver exclaimed, in a mysterious sort of whisper.

"What!" cried the ranch-keeper, in astonishment.

"Yes, you bet!" said Mack, solemnly.

"A sper't!"

"Correct."

"The Lord save us, wheer?"

"As I clim' the rise a mile from hyer; from the top of the hill arter you pass outen the canyon, you kin see jest about a rod of the road whar it goes into the sink. I knowed that, an' as I kim to the top of the hill, I jes' throwed my eyes back, careless like, an' I see'd a hoss an' rider, all white, flash by the openin' an' sail into the canyon."

"Tell me, Tommy, mon, did ye tak' a dram or two afore ye left Yreka?" asked the Scotchman, incredulously.

"Go to thunder!" responded the driver, indignant at the insinuation. "I ken I kin carry more fire

water than any other two-legged critter north of Red Bluffs an' not show it. It's the spir't of that poor bull-whacker that reckoned he could drive an' slipped up on it." Then Mack consulted the silver time-piece he carried. "The twenty minutes are up," he said, rising as he spoke. "I ain't no slouch, but I'd give my bottom dollar if I was safe in Cinnabar City."

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE RIDER.

The "pilgrims," as Mack playfully designated the passengers in the hack, came from the ranch and resumed their seats in the vehicle.

Mack mounted to the box and took up the reins.

"Gin ye meet the sper't, speer to your prayers, mon!" the Scotchman exclaimed, as the driver gave the word to loose the horses' heads.

"Go to thunder, you durned ole heathen!" Mack replied, as the coach rolled on.

Mac Ilvaine stood and watched the hack until it disappeared round the bend of the road; then, in compliance with a request from his better-half, shrilly shouted from within the shanty, he took a bucket and descended to the river for water.

As he stooped over the water's edge, some hundred paces or so from the road; the sound of a horse's hoofs fell upon his ears. In astonishment he raised his head, and turning, gazed toward the road; the story of the veteran stage-driver was still fresh in his memory.

And as the Scotchman looked, up the road from Yreka, dashing by the half-way house and disappearing around the bend toward Cinnabar City, came a wondrous sight.

A milk-white horse, clean of limb and strong in sinew, betraying the blood of the Arab, Godolphin, in its arching neck, shapely head and powerful quarters, and bearing upon its back the strangest rider that had ever grasped bridle-rein by the swift waters of the Shasta.

A rider all in white; flowing pantaloons, loose jacket, buttoned to the throat, a white hood drawn over the face and head, and reaching to the shoulders. Through two holes in the front gleamed a pair of dark and glistening eyes.

To the waist of the white rider were belted two heavy revolvers, and through his leather girdle a broad-bladed bowie-knife was thrust.

Before him, resting on the horn of the Mexican saddle, was a Spencer repeating rifle.

So rapidly did the horseman dash by the keen-eyed Scotchman that the doubting Mac Ilvaine was forced to rub his eyes in order to convince himself that he had seen aright.

"He's deevilishly weel armed for a sper't!" muttered the Scotchman, indulging in a chuckle. "I ken that it's loot that the sper't's arter."

Then he returned to the house and related to his good wife the particulars of the strange sight; but as the keeper of the ranch was well aware that the "express" contained no treasure, he was rather puzzled to account for the "bird of prey's" pursuit.

The pair of sorrels that had taken the place of the bays were not the best horses in the world for speed, and on this particular occasion they acted in a manner calculated to try the temper of a much more pleasant man than Tommy Mack.

The driver was in a hurry; the horses were not, and the result was a decided unpleasantness between the biped and the quadrupeds.

Savagely Mack brought down the long lash upon the sides of the sorrels, and they responded by dashing out their hind legs viciously, but increased not their speed a single jot.

The amount of bad language that came from the lips of the veteran driver would have astonished even a member of the renowned "army in Flanders," so celebrated in history.

But Mack had one consolation: the sound of the hoofs of the phantom steed came no more to his ears. And he was just beginning to persuade himself that both his eyes and ears had deceived him, when the flattering assumption was suddenly and rudely dispelled as he turned a bend in the road.

A hundred paces on, just where the rise of the hill commenced, stood the white horseman, halted in the center of the road, facing the hack, the repeating rifle at his shoulder, and the muzzle leveled full at the brawny chest of the driver of the express.

It was not necessary for the horseman to speak, for Mack comprehended the situation at a glance, and reined in his horses.

The spirit theory had vanished instantly from the mind of the driver when he had succeeded in getting a good look at the white-clad horseman and had beheld the carnal weapon of war gleaming in his hands. He understood that he had to deal with a road-agent, who, to disguise his person from chance of recognition, had assumed the loose, flowing garb of white.

The disguise was perfect, for only the two gleaming eyes of the man could be seen, and whether he was black or white, red or yellow, was a mystery.

Mack did not exactly understand the object of the road-agent, for there was little chance for booty in a simple passenger hack en route for the mines.

"Throw up your hands!" cried the white rider, in a strange, hollow voice, evidently assumed.

"Up they go!" responded the driver, clasping them over his head.

Mack had handled the reins too long in the mountain region to attempt to argue with a knight of the road. As many a driver had reasoned before, driving, not fighting, was what he got his money for.

"Don't attempt to put them down, or I shall be compelled to plug you!" said the stranger.

"The game is yours, pardner; I 'pass,'" Mack rejoined, tersely.

"Tell Jimmy Hughes to come out of that coach; he's wanted," the white rider said, still speaking in the strange, unnatural voice.

The two passengers in the hack had looked anxiously out of the windows when they discovered the cause of the sudden stoppage of the coach, but when the road-agent called for Jimmy Hughes, the male passenger drew in his head from the window.

"Stranger, you can't draw that card from outen this deck," replied the driver; "nary Jim Hughes aboard this hearse."

"Tell Mr. James Yorker, landlord of the Occidental Hotel, to step out, then," the road-agent said.

Mack leaned down from the box and repeated the

request of the masked rider to the passenger inside.

Yorker was as pale as death; he had drawn his revolvers, as if with intent to offer resistance, but his hands trembled visibly as he fumbled with the locks.

The girl, seated on the back seat, looked alarmed, but did not betray the intense terror so plainly written upon the face of her uncle.

"I will not go!" Yorker cried, with quivering lips.

"I am armed, and I will not be murdered without a struggle."

Mack looked astonished.

"You had better go," he said, gravely. "I reckon the galoot won't harm your carcass; he only wants your plunder."

"I will not go!" Yorker repeated. "I am armed, and will fight to the last gasp!"

"All right; it's your say-so," the driver replied, and then he turned to the masked horseman. "The pilgrim inside says that he won't come. He's 'heeled,' an' he means business."

"Crack!"

Without an instant's warning the horseman fired and sent a ball straight through the hack, right under the driver's seat, the leaden missile passing within two inches of Yorker's head.

So sudden was the action that even Mack was taken entirely by surprise, and leaped up about a foot in the air when the ball crashed through the coach just under his feet. The horses, alarmed by the flash of the powder, sheered a little to one side, dragging the hack with them, so that the road-agent had a far better chance for his aim than before.

Mack grabbed the reins; he was afraid that the frightened horses would plunge down the bank into the river.

"Durn my cats! wot are you 'bout, stranger?" Mack yelled, at the top of his voice.

"Tell Jim Yorker to come out, or I'll riddle the coach!" said the white rider, sternly.

"Hold on! thar's a woman inside!" the driver exclaimed.

"A woman!"

The tone in which the masked rider spoke plainly betrayed his astonishment.

"If you fire, you'll kill the she-critter," Mack said, in expostulation.

The masked horseman did not speak for a moment; he seemed to be meditating upon the situation.

Yorker, within the coach, was struggling with conflicting emotions. He feared to leave the vehicle, and yet he knew that the frail body of the hack would afford him but little protection if the road-agent should carry out his threat. Then, too, if the white rider did continue his attack, it must surely result in the death, not only of himself, but of the pale and wondering girl who had quitted her far Eastern home to accept his protection. And while Yorker was vainly endeavoring to decide what he should do, the white rider spoke again.

"If he's not outside of that coach in three minutes, I'll open fire!"

"You cowardly cuss!" yelled Mack, rising in wrath and shaking his fist at the man in white, "jist you throw down your shootin'-iron, and I kin wallop you outen your boots!"

And in reply to the defiance, the white rider put a ball through the driver's old slouch hat, and so near the head that Mack went over backward to the seat, certain that he had received a mortal wound.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATH SHOT OF SHASTA.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" howled Mack; "I reckon I'm played!"

"Throw up your hands, you fool, and keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll plug you in dead earnest next time!" the masked horseman exclaimed, sternly.

Then Mack discovered, all of a sudden, that he wasn't hurt, and, ashamed of his emotion, he clasped his hands over his head again and mentally resolved that he would "pass" on this game.

"Come, time is nearly up!" the unknown exclaimed; "Jim Yorker, come out of that hack, or I'll fix you so that, of your own free will, you will never step out."

"Why not go, uncle?" the girl questioned; "it is better to part with your money than to lose your life."

But it was not for his money that the portly hotel-keeper feared; there was another apprehension tugging at his heart-strings.

"Come, or I fire!" cried the horseman, in his strange, metallic voice.

"Git out, Mister Yorker, or he'll turn you into a furst-class funeral!" Mack remarked. "This cuss means business."

"Yes, do go, uncle!" the girl pleaded.

Thus advised, Yorker hesitated no longer, but rose, opened the door of the hack and descended to the ground, still carrying his revolvers in his hands, but from the way in which the hands trembled it was plain that there was but little danger of harm coming to any one from the weapons.

"Better drop your gimcracks, ole man, or he'll plug you for sure," observed the driver, noticing the revolvers.

The keen eyes of the road-agent, flashing through the holes in the white hood, instantly perceived that the hotel-keeper was a prey to fear, and had no thought of using the weapons.

"Drop your revolvers!" was the white rider's stern command.

Yorker obeyed, and stooping, placed his pistols upon the ground, then, with a powerful effort to conceal his agitation, he advanced toward the masked horseman.

Silently the road-agent awaited the coming of the hotel-keeper, nor did he speak until Yorker was within ten feet of him and had halted.

Mack, from his perch upon the box, and the girl, from the window of the coach, looked curiously up on the strange scene.

"So you call yourself James Yorker now, eh?" the horseman said.

"That is my name, sir," Yorker replied.

"And yet Cinnabar City once knew a man about your size who ran the Dry-up saloon, and who called himself Jimmy Hughes."

A long-drawn breath came from Yorker's lips, and he grew a shade paler, but he did not speak.

"I reckon that I ain't barking up the wrong tree when I say that you are that same Jimmy Hughes, the landlord of the Dry-up saloon, and once upon a time Mayor of Cinnabar City."

"I repeat, sir, my name is James Yorker," the hotel-keeper replied, the words torn, as it were, from his very heart.

"Oh, I reckon you're the man I want!" the masked rider said, with bitter emphasis. "Jimmy Hughes, have you got any prayers to say?"

"Would you murder me?" cried Yorker, in deep agitation.

"Murder!" exclaimed the horseman, reflectively. "I reckon that isn't the name for what I am going to do. Jimmy Hughes, when the law condemns a man and strangles the life out of him with a cord, the world don't call it murder; the right word is justice."

"But I have not been condemned by the law!" Yorker protested.

"Oh, yes, you have; and I've been appointed to be your executioner," the stranger retorted.

Yorker was in a maze; the horseman was speaking in riddles.

"By what law have I been condemned—for what crime—and who is my accuser?"

"The law of blood for blood, life for life!" cried the horseman, hoarsely. "Remember Cinnabar City five years ago; remember the Cinnabar mine and the bloody fight that took place there; remember poor Bill Brown swinging from the tree, with the strangling rope around his neck; think of that murdered man and the last words that came from his lips—'When your time comes, may you die as easy as I do now.' How is it with you, Jimmy Hughes? Your time has come; can you meet death with as calm a face as did the wounded foreman of the Cinnabar mine?"

"Who are you that takes upon yourself to judge of my acts?" demanded Yorker, his face pale and his nerves quivering.

"I am the Death Shot of Shasta, and my mission is to avenge the men murdered by Judge Lynch's hounds in Cinnabar City, five years ago. One by one have the cowardly assassins fallen; their bones are bleaching in the sun by the sides of Shasta, Trinity and Scott. Each beetling crag, each sunny vale, a tale can tell of missing men, who sought the avenger and fell beneath his hand. A monument of human bones my hand has reared to preserve the memory of a fearful wrong and a still more fearful retribution. Years ago, a haggard man, lifting his wan brown hands high to the sun, cried, aloud: 'Woe to the men of Cinnabar!'"

The portly hotel-keeper listened in horror; he had feared that some day he might be called to account for his share in the Cinnabar tragedy, but had believed that, with lapse of time, all recollections connected with the fearful affair would have passed from the memory of man.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Yorker. "I own I am the man who, five years ago at Cinnabar, was known as Jimmy Hughes; but, as Heaven is my judge, I tried every means in my power to prevent the bloodshed of the Cinnabar affair."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed the road-agent, with a scornful accent; "who pledged his word that, if the mine was surrendered, the defenders should not be harmed? Who, like a coward, yielded to the mob the prisoners who had surrendered, trusting to his word, and then coolly washed his hands of the whole affair?"

"I did all I could; I am not to blame!"

"Oh, no; but the part you took will cost you your life now. Prepare!"

And as he spoke, the white rider took deliberate aim with the rifle at Yorker's breast.

Then, with a wild scream, the girl sprang from the hack, and rushing to her uncle's side, courageously shielded him from the rifle of the road-agent.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, sir, do not fire!" she cried.

Slowly the rifle descended from the shoulder of the masked rider, and clutching with both hands his horse's mane, he leaned forward and stared at the girl as though she had been a spirit, fresh from the other world, rather than a mortal.

It was a picture worthy of the pencil of the artist, that little tableau on the mountain-side by Shasta's stream.

The strangely-attired horseman, with his dark eyes gleaming through the white hood like coals of fire, the portly hotel-keeper trembling in every limb, and the fair young girl, but little more than a child, with her beautiful oval face so strange in its rich complexion, like unto the cream of new milk and the blush of the crimson rose-leaf blended, lit up, too, by the most charming dark-blue eyes that e'er had given a woman cause for pride. The little hat had fallen from her head, and the long golden-brown locks were streaming down over her shapely little shoulders.

Mack, from the box of the hack, in wonder surveyed the scene.

"Is this a dream?" the white rider exclaimed, in a hoarse, unnatural voice. "Can the dead rise from the grave and grow young again?"

Both Yorker and the girl forgot their fears in wonder at the strange words.

"It is her voice—her eyes—her face—and yet she hath lain in the cold ground for full ten years!"

And then, as if stricken with a sudden fear, the white rider wheeled his steed around, and striking his sharp spurs deep into the horse's flanks, fled as though pursued by a host of specters.

Up the rise and over the hill, in amid the pines and down through the chaparral, went the masked rider, at his horse's topmost speed.

For a few seconds the echoes of the flying steed resounded upon the clear mountain air, and then died away, little by little.

"I've heered of the Death Shot of Shasta afore," the driver said, reflectively.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WING-DAM SHANTY.

A MILE or more from Cinnabar City, down the river, some adventurous miners had built a wing-dam out into the stream, with intent to uncover part of the river-bottom, trusting that in the yellow sands they should find great lumps of virgin gold.

The enterprise was a failure, and the company—known to local fame as the "Wing-dam roosters"—

"went burst," to use the terse phrase common to the mountains.

Though the company "went up"—mountain term again—the dam still remained, that is, to speak by the card, some twenty feet of the embankment defied the power of the ice-gorge or the spring freshet, fed by the melting snow from Shasta's sides.

The dam was about ten feet wide, and, as we have said, extended into the river twenty feet.

One morning a solitary miner, starting down the river with a gun on his shoulder, intent upon game, made a wonderful discovery—a discovery that caused him to halt and rub his eyes as if he doubted their evidence.

Upon the extreme point of the wing-dam was perched a shanty, rudely constructed of canvas and boards combined; and down in the river-bed, where it had been uncovered by the dam forcing the water to the north, was a gaunt and stalwart man, iron-gray haired and scraggly bearded, searching for gold.

And to add still more to the miner's astonishment, as he stood watching the man who was searching for golden grains with an old-fashioned pan, such as was used by the men of '49, the door of the shanty on the wing-dam opened, and a young girl, tall and straight, but slender as the willow bough, with clear blue eyes and light yellow hair, appeared, and in a voice which seemed to the ears of the enraptured miner like the sound of heavenly music, called out: "Breakfast is ready!"

Even this commonplace announcement did not dispel the charm that the girl's face and figure, voice and manner, had inspired in the unsophisticated heart of Sandy Rocks, as the miner was termed.

The hard-featured old man, washing the dirt by the river, rose to his feet, and as he did so, his eyes fell upon the miner standing in the road, with mouth agape. An angry scowl came over his face, and Sandy, who had determined upon scraping an acquaintance with the old fellow, preparatory to an introduction to the girl, suddenly concluded that he would postpone that operation to some future occasion.

The surly-looking old man went into the house, and the door closing, hid the face and figure of the girl.

Sandy drew a long breath, like a man suddenly roused from a dream of bliss, and upon the instant he concluded that he didn't care much about shooting that day, anyway.

Then he went down the road toward Yreka, as if he was intent on proceeding on his way; but when he had got fairly out of sight of the house upon the wing-dam, he sneaked into the bushes which lined the hillside, and scouted back to where he could command a view of the wing-dam shanty.

Couching like a rabbit in its burrow, Sandy watched and waited.

In due time the old man came from the shanty and resumed his labor by the side of the river, and a short time afterward the girl came out, washed some tin cups and dishes, evidently the breakfast utensils, in the river, and then again withdrew to the shelter of the house.

The old man stuck to his work steadily for a couple of hours, and to Sandy's astonishment, he discovered that the dirt was panning out pretty well, considering the simple means used to retain the gold. At the end of two hours, and just as Sandy was beginning to think of abandoning his position for the purpose of returning to town and relating to the boys the wonderful discovery he had made, the old man laid aside his pan, sat down upon the ground right in the full glare of the sun, and drawing a dirty pack of cards from his pocket, proceeded to gamble all by himself, the left hand against the right.

If there had been thousands of dollars at stake on the game, the old fellow could not have manifested greater interest.

For three hours at least did the solitary gambler shuffle, cut, deal and play with the pictured pasteboard, Sandy lying at full length on his stomach, kicking his heels up in the air and watching him.

Then the door of the shanty again opened, and the girl appeared. A look of sorrow came over her pale, intellectual face as she noticed the occupation of the old man, and Sandy, peering eagerly from his covert in the bushes, fancied that a sigh escaped from her lips.

"Dinner!" the girl announced.

The old man gathered up the well-worn pack of cards, deposited them carefully in his pocket, and rising to his feet, entered the house.

The door closed, and again Sandy drew a long breath.

Rising from his recumbent position, the young miner "scooted" back to town, eager to reveal what he had seen.

"Thar's an old galoot an' a reg'lar double-back-action angel a-livin' in a shanty on the wing-dam!"

Such was the startling announcement that Sandy Rocks made in the bar-room of the Occidental Hotel.

After hearing the miner's wonderful yarn, of course it was only natural that nearly all the young men of Cinnabar City should discover that they had particular business in the vicinity of the wing-dam, and should travel in that direction pretty often.

The old hard-featured miner, too, came into town to dispose of his dust, and to procure groceries, and—the truth must be told—to sample the fire-water sold in the saloons of Cinnabar.

But no miner, old or young, ever gained admittance within the wing-dam shanty.

"No, boys," the old man would exclaim, when full charged with "fire-water," and disposed to be sociable, "the line must be drawn somewhere, so let it be at the threshold of the wing-dam shanty." The old man had, unconsciously perhaps, adopted the popular appellation assigned to his cabin. "You're all gentlemen, judges of good liquor and scholars; I'm proud to call you all friends of mine, but I ain't receiving visitors as much as I was."

It was evident, even to the most indifferent observer, that some dark mystery was connected with the past life of the old miner.

When questioned as to his name, he had simply said that if people called him Joseph Ugly he would answer to it, and so, in accordance with the usual custom of the mining region, Joe Ugly was speedily transformed into Ugly Joe, and by that name the old, nervous, drunken, gambling miner was called before he had lived a month in the wing-dam shanty.

Ugly Joe was strangely reserved about his past life, even when his brain was reeling under the influence of liquor.

Regularly every Saturday night he would come into town, sell his gold-dust, the proceeds of his week's labor, buy a few groceries, then make a bee-line to the Occidental Saloon, get into the private room at the back of the bar, join a poker-party, and when the hour of twelve struck and the gamblers and drinkers were turned out by the bar-keeper, fleeced of every cent of his money and drunk all through, Ugly Joe would take his little parcel of groceries and stagger homeward to his cabin on the wing-dam.

A more inveterate or unlucky gambler never handled a card.

Shrewd men who became well acquainted with Ugly Joe, easily detected that he had once occupied a prominent position in the East, and was a gentleman both by birth and education, though now but little more than a drunken sot. Chance remarks tending to confirm this suspicion would slip from him in his drunken moments, but nothing to afford any clew to his past history.

His daughter, for such was the relationship that the girl bore to Ugly Joe, was generally termed Nelly, when he spoke of her; but it was by chance discovered that her name was Elinore.

One dark and stormy Saturday night, or rather on a Sunday morning—for the hour of midnight had passed—old Ugly Joe, the blood streaming freely from a severe wound in his head, and drunk as usual, escorted by a full-bearded, long-haired man, dressed with scrupulous care, came down the road from Cinnabar City to his house on the wing-dam.

Through the chinks of the shutter that guarded the single window streamed a few flickering rays of light, proving that the daughter waited as usual for her father's return, drunk, ugly, and "broke."

The full-bearded man knocked at the door; Elinore opened it instantly, and at the first glance recognized the long-haired gentleman.

It was "Cherokee," the best poker-player in the Shasta valley.

CHAPTER V.

THE HAUNTED MINE.

"Is that so now, pard, on yer honor, old man?"

"It's a sure enough fact, gentl'men," cried a stalwart miner in the midst of a little crowd who were clinking glasses at the bar of the Occidental Hotel, in the city of Cinnabar, replying to the doubting Thomas of the throng, who had put the question; "I reckon that I see'd it myself, an' ef thar's any gentl'man doubts my word, I stand ready to fight him at oncet."

As no one accepted the challenge, it was plain that the speaker's veracity was undoubted.

"It's a sure enough fact, gentl'men," the miner repeated. "I say it, and the man that disputes it calls me a liar, an' I stand ready to 'pologize to him, if he's bigger nor I am. I'm the man-from-Red-Dog, I am, an' I say it, an' say it boldly; I kin drink more benzine than any other man of my inches in this hyer State of Californy!"

"W-all, I reckon we'll hev to take a hack at the mine anyway," one of the crowd remarked.

"Let's hear the rights of the thing," another miner said.

"I reckon that our friend hyer, Billy King, kin spin the yarn for you," the man-from-Red-Dog observed, nodding to the bar-keeper. "He's posted."

"I hain't paid much attention to what you've been saying, gents," the bar-keeper answered.

"Why, it's 'bout the haunted mine; that's what we call it 'bout hyer, gents," Dandy Jim, the Red-Dogite, explained.

"Oh, yes, the Cinnabar lode."

"That's it; that's it!" cried three or four of the crowd.

"Yes; you see, our party heered that there was a rich lode down hyer that had been abandoned, so we just walked our chinks down the valley to see if we could make a strike," the leader of the party added, in explanation.

"They let me into what they was arter—this gentl'man is an old side-partner of mine when I had my hunting-grounds down in the Washoe district," Dandy Jim said. "In course, I jest showed him how the keerds were runnin'. But, Billy, you kin spin it out fine, so gi'n the boys a sight for their money."

"Well, really, gentl'men, it's a clean beat on you, if you reckon to make a strike on the Cinnabar property; it's been clean gone for years. Why, I've been joggling tumbler in this hyer blessed saloon for nigh onto three years, and I reckon that I've heered of ten or fifteen attempts to work the Cinnabar lode, an' each one had to 'lite' out without making ary a red."

"The lode is 'played,' then," the leader of the prospectors remarked, in a tone which betrayed considerable disgust.

"Oh, no; the mine is jest as good as it ever was; the ore requires a mill, though; but you kin sell the stuff to one of the concerns running stamps, provided you kin git it out, and gents, I stand ready to lay you five to one you won't do that?"

The miners looked at each other a little astonished. There were six, all told, in the party, who had come down the valley, attracted by the story of the abandoned mine.

"If the pay-dirt is thar, why can't we git it out?" the leader of the party demanded.

"Heavens an' yearth, gentl'men, the mine is haunted!" yelled the man-from-Red-Dog, excitedly. "Regular old king devil, hoofs an' horns, an' a tail like a mule! An' ef ary man doubts my word, I stand ready to fight him like a gentl'man, an' ef that ain't squar, I'll drink with ary man in the crowd."

The miners looked incredulous, but did not frame their doubts into words.

"Yes, sir-ee!" exclaimed the bar-keeper, decidedly, "that's the honest truth. The Cinnabar mine is haunted. As I said afore, there's been ten or a dozen, mebbe more, attempts to work the lode, an' the ghosts hev frightened 'em off."

"Ghosts in the mine!" exclaimed the leader of the party, evidently an unbeliever.

"Heaps on 'em!" said the man-from-Red-Dog, impressively. "All sorts of ghosts, white, Injun and tan-colored."

"It's so, gents," the bar-keeper added; "there's no mistake about it! Thar's something onnatural 'bout

that mine. Ef thar had bin only one or two men skeered, mebbe you might say that they had drank too much whisky, an' imagined they saw things when really thar wa'n't nothin'; but when it come to twenty or thirty men run out of the place—men who kin carry all the whisky that they kin h'ist, like this gent'l'man hyer"—and the man-from-Red-Dog bowed gravely at the compliment as the bar-keeper pointed to him—"why, then, I'll allow that it won't do for you to say thar ain't a good square ghost in the business."

The miners looked at each other dubiously, for a moment, as if each one was intent upon reading his neighbor's thoughts in his face.

"Wa-al, I don't want to be stiff in doubting any gent'l'man's word," the leading miner observed, slowly and gravely; "but when you consider that we hev traveled some miles fur to get at this hyer mine, nat'rally we don't like 'passing' without a look at our cards."

"Right you are, old man!" admitted the bar-keeper; "an' as ye will hev it so, I'll spin the yarn to yer quicker than a jack-rabbit kin travel a mile. Furst an' foremost, three or four years ago, the Cinnabar lode was reported to be the biggest strike ever made in the north hyer. There was a reg'lar company, mills an' works, an' a canal to run the stamps; then thar was a heap of trouble with the Injuns, an' they jist kind o' hooped things round hyer, an' 'bout whipped Cinnabar City clean out. When the Injuns war whipped an' the town commenced to grow ag'in—that's the time a young man 'bout my size arrove—some chaps took hold of the Cinnabar lode. You see, gent'l'men, the original workers had run a tunnel twenty or thirty feet into the rock, an' of course that was thar, an' all right. The miners dug away the burnt timbers that kinder obstructed the mouth of the tunnel, an' went at it. They got inside an' commenced to take out the stuff, when all of a sudden they heered a most awful lot of groans, an' then a shower of rocks came tumbling down upon their heads. Well, now, gent'l'men, you kin jist shoot me for a sucker ef the boys didn't hop out of that tunnel right lively; they didn't wait to be told to git, but they dusted instanter."

"Mebbe thar was some cuss hid in the tunnel a-playin' roots on the boys?" one of the miners suggested.

"Oh, yes, mebbe thar was!" observed the bar-keeper, scornfully; "an' mebbe that same galoot has bin a-playing roots on all the mining-folks who have tackled the Cinnabar lode for a good three years now?"

The miners listened, but they were not at all convinced.

"What makes the ghost haunt the mine?" asked one of the crowd, addressing the urbane Billy King.

"Pardner, you are almost too much for me; I kin hardly foller that lead," the bar-keeper replied, in a reflective sort of way. "I did hear, onct on a time, that the ghosts was supposed to be the spirits of two men called Talbot and Brown; they were superintendent and foreman of the original Cinnabar Company, I believe; they got into some trouble, an' were hung by Judge Lynch jist outside the town."

"And since that time they haunt the mine, eh?"

"Correct!" declared the bar-keeper.

"See hyer, boys!" said the leader of the miners, suddenly; "let's take a look at this hyer tunnel right away. I don't want to doubt the word of any gent'l'man, but seein' is believin', an' arter I see the ghosts, I won't say ary word more."

"I'm with you, old man!" exclaimed Dandy Jim. "I'll chip in with you for fun; I've had a good deal to do with spirits since I was weaned."

The crowd grinned at the joke, took another drink all round and then started for the ruined Cinnabar mine.

The night was dark and the air chilly; lights twinkled like so many stars from the little windows of the miners' cabins by the roadside; but when the party reached the Cinnabar tunnel, the gloom and silence of the tomb reigned therein. Little wonder that local traditions reported that the dark tunnel was the abode of unquiet spirits.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

The adventurers halted at the mouth of the tunnel and surveyed the dark hole in the rock with a great deal of curiosity.

"Darker'n Egypt!" exclaimed Dandy Jim, laconically.

"How air we a-goin' to see anything without a light?" demanded one of the party.

The members of the little throng looked at each other with blank faces. Not one of them had thought of lights.

"Let's raise a pool and send for some candles," suggested the man-from-Red-Dog.

The idea was at once acted upon.

Fifty cents were contributed, and one of the miners was dispatched to procure candles. The rest of the party seated themselves upon the numerous boulders scattered about at the mouth of the tunnel, to wait his return.

"We'll raise the blind," observed Dandy Jim, facetiously; "but I'm bettin' odds that we don't rake the pile."

No one replied to the remark, and the man-from-Red-Dog subsided. Even his bold and reckless spirit felt the gloomy influence of the place and hour.

Ten or fifteen minutes had the party waited in silence, all eyes glaring eagerly upon the dark mouth of the tunnel, as if each of the adventuring band expected to see a grisly ghost stalk forth from the gloomy portal that guarded the hidden treasures of Cinnabar's golden lode.

But the miners watched and waited in vain, and, while watching, there came a dark form describing a devious course toward the deserted mine.

The waiting band rose in surprise.

That the man was drunk was quite evident; no better proof could be asked or given than his attempt to step over a boulder two foot high and a yard broad at least.

"Wa-ll, I'm durned ef the galoot hain't turned the candle-fund into whisky, an' put himself on the outside of it!" exclaimed the man-from-Red-Dog, in great disgust, as he beheld the inebriate sprawling over the boulder.

"Tain't Jake!" said the leader of the party, after

a careful glance at the new-comer. "He's shorter an' fatter 'n Jake."

"That's so!" chimed in another.

By this time the stranger had approached within a dozen yards of the miners, and they suddenly became visible to his blinking eyes.

He halted short and balanced himself on his unsteady legs, swaying like a heavy sign-board in the breeze.

"I've got 'em ag'in!" the man howled, in a tone of horror; "got 'em sure'n blazes! Ain't no rats or snakes this time, but kangaroos, a-standin' on their hind-legs. Never 'll drink any more rum, so help me Bob!" And as the stranger attempted to shake hands with himself to ratify the pledge, he lost his balance, tumbled over, and went sprawling down upon the ground all in a heap.

The sight was too much for the risibles of the miners, and they roared with laughter.

The drunkard instantly sat up and assumed an expression that was meant to be dignity itself. His fears had vanished, for the roar of laughter put to flight the phantoms of his imagination, and he perceived at once that he had humans to deal with instead of the strange and fearful allies that attend the man-with-the-poker when he attacks his victims.

"Pon my soul this is too bad!" he exclaimed, and in a tone which fully betrayed how deeply his feelings had been hurt by the discordant merriment of the miners; "a gent'l'man goin' quietly home an' talkin' 'bout kangaroos an' things, an' sits down to rest himself, for to be laughed at as ef he was under the influence of liquor! It is too bad, my lord dook, that you should put this slight upon me. What hev I done that you should beard me thusly in Denmark?"

Again the miners laughed; the pathetic appeal of the stranger was almost as funny as had been his fright and downfall.

"Gent'l'men, this ain't the squar' thing on a man an' a brother!" exclaimed the toper, mournfully, as he scrambled to his feet—a proceeding that was not easily accomplished. "I put it to you, partners, is it the cheese for to haw-haw at a pilgrim in this hyer vale of tears?"

The drunken stranger had approached quite close to the little group standing by the mouth of the tunnel, and, straightening himself up by the aid of a huge boulder, was gazing inquiringly upon the faces of the miners.

By the dim light stealing from the overcast heavens, the miners could make out that the stranger was short and fat, ragged and dirty, and pretty well advanced in years. That he had about all the "fire-water" on board that he could carry had been apparent at the first glance.

"No offense, old man," responded Dandy Jim; "we thought that you were a loose mule."

"Now, by St. Paul, but thar is much offense!" returned the stranger, with an air of drunken dignity; "but I looks over it, gent'l'men; I never bear any malice, not even when a man takes me fur to be a mule."

Then the stranger took another good look at the faces before him, and struck his hand upon his forehead in a tragic manner.

The crowd looked upon this proceeding with wonder, and more than one of the party came at once to the conclusion that the man had "got 'em" this time in downright earnest; and they fully expected to witness a snake-killing act ere long.

But the ragged stranger had not got the complaint so peculiarly and popularly known as the "jim-jams." It was only a bit of acting that he was indulging in.

"I knew it!" he howled, aloud, and so suddenly that he rather startled his listeners. "I would hev gone my bottom dollar onto it when I first heard that snicker. It air him! I'll bet rocks on it! Kin I forget Dutch Flat and the pleasant plains of the Yuba? Nary time! Kin I forget the man that ducked me in the Feather river, jist because I happened to hold three aces in my hand when he had two in his'n? Nary time! Jim Jones, old man, how are ye?" And with the word the ragged bumner forsook the support of the rocks and cast himself suddenly upon the stalwart miner, the leader of the little party.

Jim Jones's reply was emphatic, if not particularly cordial.

He gave the stranger a violent poke in the stomach, and exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled with feeling:

"Why, Joe Bowers, you derved old sucker, hev you turned up ag'in?"

The miner was quite right in regard to the identity of the individual he addressed; it was the original Joe Bowers in person.

"Jimmas, I hev!" replied Mr. Bowers, as soon as he recovered from the effects of the miner's powerful salutation, "an' as I was a follow'n' my lonely path this hyer night, I sed to myself, says I, ef thar's one man on this hyer footstool that I, Joseph Bowers, would like to see more'n another, that man is that old king beat, Jim Jones."

"Whar air you now, Jones?" inquired the man-from-Red-Dog, amid the roars of the rest of the crowd.

"Gent'l'men, I'm proud to meet you," said Mr. Bowers, with a great deal of dignity, waving his hand toward the crowd. "My old side-partner, Jimmas Jones, he knows me, he does, an' I reckon he'll say that I'm the clear white article an' no mistake; I'm all pay-dirt from my toe-nails to my ha'r, an' I'll guarantee to pan out rich. Gent'l'men, as I sed afore, I'm glad to meet you. I reckon that thar is a special Providence that looks arter the original old Joe Bowers, fur as I was a-walkin' along to-night, my mind was oneasy on one p'int; whar shall I raise a dollar fur to pay my washerwoman with? an' then, lo and behold! I run into your crowd; I strike a lead! all I'm 'fraid of is, that you'll all want to lend me a dollar, an' I don't want but one."

The fancy of Dandy Jim was tickled by the exquisite coolness of the veteran "beat." He had seen some hard cases in his time, but the original Joe Bowers "cleaned" 'em.

"I'll go a quarter on the old man, jist for greens!" the man-from-Red-Dog exclaimed.

"Hand it over, pard!" responded Bowers; "never shall it be sed that old Joe Bowers refused a loan from a friend 'cos the amount was small."

But just at that moment the messenger arrived with the candles.

"Had an awful time to get 'em," he explained.

"Thar's been a run on candles, an' the bank's nigh broke."

"What do you want with candles?" asked Bowers, a sudden suspicion taking possession of his mind.

"We're going to examine the tunnel hyer."

"What?" fairly howled Bowers; "don't you know the mine is haunted? I've seen the ghosts myself!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MINE.

THE crowd looked decidedly astonished. Talking ghost at the mouth of the so-called haunted tunnel, in the gloom of the night, was quite another thing from discussing the matter in the illuminated saloon of the Occidental Hotel.

Joe Bowers was not so drunk as not to be able to see that he had made an impression, so he continued in the same strain.

"It's jes' orful, boys, I tell yer," he said, with a solemn shake of the head. "The groans an' screams an' yells of that air ghost is enuff to lift the ha'r right off yer heads; that's so for ducats, gent'l'men."

"Oh! you're jes' trying to fool us!" exclaimed Jones, unwilling to confess that the words of the bumner had made any impression upon him.

"Nary time!" cried Bowers, impressively; "gent'l'men, wouldn't deceive you fur the world. Ask anybody that knows me; they'll jes' tell you that the original Joe Bowers is old reliable every time. When it comes to a question of veracity, why, I'm jes' worth my weight in gold. Thar's more ghosts in this hyer tunnel than a man can shake a stick at in a week."

"Didn't I tell you it were haunted?" demanded the man-from-Red-Dog, triumphantly.

"Wa-ll, I'm goin' to see 'em," Jones replied, doggedly.

"Yes, yes," muttered two or three more of the party, reluctant to give up their design.

"In course, nary bluff!" chimed in Bowers; "see the 'blind' and hev a 'sight' fur your money. You'll be satisfied then. But, gent'l'men, I was right hyer when the hull thing happened, an' I'm posted."

"The tumbler-slinger at the Occidental sed somethin' 'bout the furst owners being cleaned out by the vigilantes," one of the party remarked.

"Correct!" admitted Bowers; "I was hyer an' seen the hull thing. The six men that they hung were all bosom friends of mine; regular side-partners."

"Six! were there six of 'em hung?" cried one of the party, who still had the bar-keeper's story fresh in his mind.

"I bet yer ther was!" affirmed the bumner, decidedly. "I reckon that it was about the bloodiest time ever seen in this hyer golden Californy. It was orful!"

"And do their ghosts haunt the tunnel?" asked a miner, casting a nervous glance around him as he spoke.

"Yes, an' a heap more, too."

"More!" the miners were more decidedly astonished now than before.

"Oh, yes; thar was a bloody fight afore the army of the vigilance commit' took the mine. I guess thar was nigh onto forty of the boys laid out."

"Thunder! you don't mean for to say that thar's all them ghosts in this hyer hole!" Jones was evidently alarmed.

"Jes' knock at the door an' walk in," Bowers observed, with dignity; "ef you doubt me, walk in. All I've got to say is that thar's bin a heap of good men skeered outen that hole."

"I'm goin' to have a try, anyway!" Jones exclaimed, undauntedly; "who'll foller?"

"I'm you're antelope!" cried the man-from-Red-Dog. "I got skeered hyer onct, but I'll take a second try, anyhow."

"Go it!" said another one of the crowd, and, in fact, nearly all of the party manifested a desire to dare the mysteries of the haunted mine.

"I'll fotch up the rear," observed Bowers; "I'm a leetle short-winded, an' I want a fair start when the runnin' part comes in."

"Let each man take a candle an' light 'em arter we get inside the tunnel," ordered Jones.

The messenger distributed the candles; and, thus armed and equipped, the adventurers entered the dark portal that led to the treasures of the Cinnabar lode.

Once fairly within the tunnel, the candles were lighted; this operation was not unattended with difficulty, for a considerable current of air was drawing through the rock doorway.

The tunnel was dark as a pocket and as gloomy as a tomb, the flickering light of the half-dozen sputtering candles only seemed to make the darkness more visible.

Ten—twenty paces, the little procession advanced into the somber cavern, and then, Jones, the leader, suddenly halted, his eyes attracted by a projecting lump of ore on the right wall.

"Thunder! this looks like mighty good stuff!" he exclaimed, as he held the candle close to the lump and noted the little streaked veins that ran through the rock.

"Pay-dirt, sure!" suggested the miner next to Jones, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, it's all rich, boys; heap good!" cried Bowers, from his secure position in the rear of the party. "They were jes' makin' ducats outen this hyer mine when the leetle trouble occurred."

"Boys, we're in fur a good thing!" Jones declared abruptly. "If I know anything 'bout dirt, this is richer'n thunder. The claim's abandoned, so I move that we locate hyer to onct."

"You can't hold it!" put in Bowers.

"Why not?" demanded the miner, angrily.

"The ghosts won't let yer!"

"I'll risk that," replied Jones, just a little boastfully, for as the spirits of the deserted mine had not yet resented the intrusion of the adventurers upon their domain, the hardy miner began to believe that the ghosts were a fiction.

"Ef they don't trouble you, something else will," Bowers remarked, in a solemn sort of way.

"What will?"

"Why, every party that has tried to work this mine has b'en driven off; ef they stood the ghosts, their tools have been stolen, their timber-work set on fire, an' they have been popped at with revolvers till they were glad to quit."

"Who did it?"

"The ghosts, I reckon," Bowers answered, solemnly; "leastways, nobody ever found out who did it." "I'll risk the whole kerboodle!" cried Jones, defiantly, and he slapped his hand down upon the projecting lump of ore as he spoke. "This hyer strike is worth four aughts anyway, an' I'd jes' like for to see the critter, human or inhuman, that kin take it away from me!"

In answer to the bold defiance, a low, mournful wail came sighing along the low, vaulted roof of the cavern.

The adventurers started, and one, more nervous than the rest, dropped his candle.

"What th' blazes is that?" muttered the man-from-Red-Dog, glancing around him suspiciously.

"Tain't anything but the wind," cried Jones, who tried to appear unconcerned. "Tain't nothin' but the wind, I say," he repeated.

"You—lie!"

Clear and distinct came the words, re-echoing along above their heads.

The miners fairly jumped as the words fell upon their ears, and each man looked at his neighbor as if unwilling to believe the evidence of his own senses.

There was no ascribing this sound to the influence of the wind, and even Jones, brave and reckless as he was, felt a cold shiver pass over him.

"It's all a trick!" he cried, hoarsely, and drawing the revolver from his belt as he spoke. "Thar's some darned galoot hid hyer, somewhar, an' I'll jes' have him out."

The cylinder of the revolver clicked around as Jones drew back the hammer. With the candle in one hand and the cocked revolver in the other, the miner advanced clear to the end of the tunnel, but his search was fruitless; there wasn't a hole, as far as he could discover, big enough to afford concealment to a man.

"I am the spirit of Richard Talbot—ha, ha, ha!"

Clear and shrill was the speech, and it seemed to come from the roof, right over Jones's head.

The miner gave one single glance at the jagged rocks above him, and then, yielding to a sudden fear, he dropped the candle and started for the entrance of the tunnel.

This was quite enough for the rest of the crowd. The moment the candle dropped, they turned and fled for dear life.

The unfortunate Mr. Bowers was knocked down by the sudden and unexpected rush, and all the party trampled over him, much to his disgust and bodily hurt. The way the bumner swore was a caution.

Within an hour, Cinnabar City was wondering at the ghost story.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELINORE SPEAKS.

A STRANGE picture, that little tableau in the wing-dam shanty; the old man with his scraggy gray locks and beard; the girl tall, slender and lily-like; and the gentlemanly, brown-bearded "Cherokee."

The girl's cheek paled just a little as she saw the blood streaming down over the face of the old man. The gambler hastened to explain.

"Don't be alarmed, miss," he said, as he assisted old Joe into the house; "it's only a little clip on the head; not at all dangerous."

The girl brought forward a box for her father to sit upon—chairs there were none in the wretched home of the miner. Then, without paying the slightest attention to the stranger, the girl brought a tin basin, half filled with water, and a cloth, and proceeded to wipe away the blood.

Cherokee closed the door, leaned carelessly against it, and looked upon the proceedings with a high degree of interest.

The old man was so much under the influence of liquor as to be almost helpless; the girl had propped him up against the wall and steadied him with her hand while she examined the wound upon his head.

It was only a simple cut, and Elinore quickly bound it up; then turning, she saw to her surprise that the man who had brought her father home still remained in the shanty. She had not noticed this fact before.

A cold, hard look came over the fair young face, and even if Cherokee had been as dull of wit as he was keen, he must have understood that his company was not wanted; yet he kept his place and not a muscle of his calm, pleasant face moved.

A shade of annoyance passed over the maiden's pale features. Standing by the side of her helpless, drunken father, one hand upon his shoulder to keep him from falling, and the other half-extended toward the brown-bearded man leaning so quietly against the door, as if to bid him depart, Elinore seemed more like a spirit from the other world than a woman of flesh and blood.

Cherokee had seen many a beautiful woman in his time, but as he looked upon the face of the strange daughter of the still stranger sire, he could not help confessing to himself that he had seen but few girls to match with the tenant of the wing-dam shanty.

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," the girl said, slowly and mechanically, speaking as if each word cost her a throb of pain. "Had not you better go?"

"Hol' on!" muttered old Ugly, suddenly waking to a consciousness of what was going on around him; "don't let 'um go—got groceries in his pocket."

Then the old man attempted to get up, but only succeeded in tumbling from the box to the floor, where he immediately proceeded to stretch himself out and go to sleep.

"Yes, miss," Cherokee said, "your father is right; I've got articles of his in my pocket."

The gentleman at once fished them out; four small packages—sugar, tea, coffee and salt. And as he extracted them from their resting-place, the skirts of his coat were displaced, and the butts of two silver-mounted revolvers and the hilt of a good-sized bowie-knife peeped out.

Cherokee was a regular walking arsenal.

"I was afraid that he might lose them on the way, so I corraled them in my pocket," he explained, as he placed the articles on the table.

The girl watched him with her large, earnest eyes, but did not speak.

After placing the articles upon the table, Cherokee turned irresolutely to the girl; it was evident that he had something more to say. Elinore perceived

this at a glance, but neither by look or gesture did she encourage him to proceed. It was extremely evident that she wished to get rid of him as soon as possible.

"I reckon that I've got something more here that belongs to the old gentleman," he said.

The girl looked, but spoke not; no expression, except the blank one of utter weariness, was visible upon her face.

Cherokee took three little bags from his pocket, and placed them beside the parcels upon the rude table, which, by the way, was merely a wide board nailed to a tree-stump, and that in turn nailed to the floor. The bags were the usual buck-skin gold-dust bags, so common to the mining regions.

Just a little look of surprise crept over the girl's face; the buck-skin bags were a mystery to her.

"Gold-dust, miss," Cherokee said; "the old gentleman was lucky to-night. I reckon he's got a couple of hundred dollars right here. He bluffed the game."

"On a little pair of trays—nothin' but clear grit; a white man never says die!" muttered the old fellow on the floor, who, after the fashion of some drunken men, slept with one eye open.

"Yes, miss, he bluffed us all down," Cherokee added, with an assumption of cheerful honesty, that did not at all deceive the girl. "He just 'cleaned' us this time."

"Go fur 'em ag'in," muttered the sleeper; "I want a hundre' thousan' dollars!"

A shiver passed over the slight figure of the maid, and Cherokee marveled greatly as he observed it.

"It was all along of this money that your father got that ugly clip on the head," Cherokee continued.

"Some rough fellows saw him win the money, and as he left for home immediately afterward, they concluded to waylay him and save him the trouble of carrying the dust. I saw them leave the saloon right after him, and I suspected that they might be apt to try some such little game, so I concluded to take a hand in myself. They were almost too quick for me, though, for they jumped on your father right outside the door. They only got one blow at him before I was on them, and then they run. I helped him up, pocketed the money and groceries, and brought him home."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir, for saving him from his assailants, but I should have been better pleased if you had let them take the money."

Cherokee looked the astonishment he felt.

"Why, miss, I don't exactly understand?"

"The money will do him no good," the girl said, a bitter accent in her voice. "If he had come home penniless as usual, he would have gone to work on Monday and kept steady at it throughout the week; but, as it is, he will go to town on Monday and come home at night drunk; then he will be sick for three or four days, for he cannot stand two nights of drink coming so close together. Money is a curse to him; he always gambles, always loses, and I cannot understand how he happened to win this large sum."

"Well, miss, to come right down to the solid truth," Cherokee remarked, in a blunt, honest sort of way, "your father got in with a pretty fair lot of men to-night, considering that they were all black sheep, and they kinder allowed that it were a shame that the old man should go home cleaned out all the time, and I reckon that they kinder agreed to let him take a rake for once, seeing that it was nigh twelve and that he couldn't play after that time."

"That's a lie!" cried old Ugly, very promptly and distinctly, sitting up and supporting himself against the wall of the shanty as he spoke. "That's a lie, an' you know it, Cherokee! I bluffed the whole crowd on you, an' I kin do it ag'in for money. I've been robbed of a hundre' thousan' dollars; you know it—all of you know it! You're a hull lot of thieves, an' I'll win a hundre' thousan' dollars out of you 'fore I'm two days older. Elinore, put that man out! What's he doin' in a gentl'man's house without bein' invited? I used to draw my check for fifty thousan' dollars, an' it was as good as wheat. A set of scoundrels robbed me, curse 'em!"

And after this passionate outbreak, the old toper curled himself up on the floor again and went to sleep.

Cherokee listened to the ravings of the drunkard unmoved. He had heard a good deal of that sort of talk in his day. With the peculiar, soft, noiseless step so like the stealthy tread of the tiger closing in upon his prey, that was common to him, Cherokee crossed to his old position by the door.

"I see that I can't be of any use here, so I'll just levant, miss," he said, quietly, sinking his voice so as not to disturb the sleeper. "I'll just tell the boys, miss, how the matter stands. The crowd I travel with ain't robbers, miss; we don't skin any poor old drunken men; but your father will play, miss; you can't keep him away from the poker table; but that ain't the worst of it; he can't play poker worth a cent, and he thinks he can. He's just the softest flat that ever slipped a card. I feel sorry for—for your father, miss, and I'll think over his case. Good-night."

Cherokee lifted his hat politely, and stepped through the door into the darkness of the night. The girl was gone from his eyes, but her image was imprinted on his heart.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CLEAR-GRIT SHARP.

In the bar-room of the Occidental Hotel, Tommy Mack, the veteran stage-driver, was relating to a wondering crowd the particulars of the strange and unexpected attack that the white rider had made upon the express that day.

It was about the fiftieth time that he had described the remarkable event, and it is but doing faint justice to the merits of the time-worn driver to say that the relation lost nothing by constant repetition, and that, little by little, Tommy had elaborated the story until it had grown into a most remarkable yarn.

The listeners heard and wondered, and speculation was busy as to who the disguised man was, and why he wished to kill the new landlord of the Occidental Hotel.

There were ten or fifteen within the saloon, and they had gathered closely around the stage-driver.

"I tell you what it is, gentl'men," exclaimed Mack, in conclusion, "I jist records my opinion right hyer that we ain't heerd the last of this white galoot yet. Jist you foller my lay-out, gentl'men: the

Death Shot of Shasta will leave his mark on some big-bug in this hyer town afore long."

And, just as Mack gave utterance to this prophetic remark, a very strange individual entered the saloon—a man slenderly built and about the medium size, dressed very roughly—miner-fashion. His white and delicate hands, however, betrayed at the first glance that they had never been much accustomed to manual labor. But the face was the strange part of the man. It was frightfully distorted, livid in hue, and a terrible scar, almost deep enough to lay your finger in, extended on the right-hand side of his face, from the jawbone to the forehead. At the first glance at the stranger's distorted face, one would naturally wonder by what miracle a man could receive such a terrible wound and live to show the mark of it.

The man was a new-comer to Cinnabar City. Only some ten days before had he made his appearance in the streets of the mining metropolis.

His first inquiry had been for a paying claim that he could buy out. He was speedily accommodated, for not a claim-owner was there in the valley that didn't possess the fee-simple to the richest "lead" that had ever been struck on the top of "this yere airth," if the statement of the aforesaid owner was to be credited. And, strange to relate, not a man of them all was there that did not express himself willing to dispose of the richest bit of "s'ile in this hyer country," for a very trifling consideration—say, from ten dollars up to a hundred; and it was a fact worthy to be recorded, that the worse the local reputation of the "claim," the higher was the price the owner set upon it; probably remembering the oft-quoted injunction about "taking the stranger in."

The stranger was easily pleased, and finally bought one of the most notoriously worthless lodes within the district of Cinnabar. "Clear-grit Lode" the original proprietor had named the claim, and aptly it had been called, if sticking tightly to its golden treasures betrayed clear grit. Many a dollar had gone into the lode, and very few had come out of it.

And so, when Mr. Alexander Brown, as he was handled—to use the miner phrase—the gentleman from Ohio, forked over twenty-five dollars to William Yuba—more commonly termed Yuba Bill—the happy owner of the Clear-grit claim, in consideration of all his right and title to that incipient treasure-house, all the inhabitants of Cinnabar, who had any knowledge of the transaction, at once set the stranger down as being a first-class "flat," and there was a simultaneous rush of miners who had productive claims to dispose of to interview Mr. Brown, with intent to transfer some of his money to their pockets; but when they learned that after the land transaction was over, Mr. Brown had accepted an invitation from the jovial William to take a hand in the festive game of poker, and had succeeded, in the short space of an hour, in not only relieving the gallant Yuba of the twenty-five dollars that he had received for his quit-claim deed to the Clear-grit lode, but had also transferred about a hundred dollars in clear cash from Yuba's pockets to his own, then the miners concluded that they had made a mistake, and unanimously pronounced Mr. Brown to be a great American fraud.

As Yuba pathetically said, when detailing to a wondering crowd the particulars of the astonishing game: "I wouldn't have keered a red for the money, but to hev a thin, slab-sided galoot like him, thet I thought couldn't handle the 'papers,' put up a job onto me, an' deal me two queens, an' fix it so that I was to ketch another queen in the draw, and he havin' four jacks, it were too bad; an' when I were jis' a-goin' to rise and clim' him, fur to hev him see me an' go six better with a seven-shooter, it were too much for human natur' to stand."

The crowd sympathized with the gentle William, and, as their sympathy was entirely of a practical nature, inside of an hour the sheriff had Yuba in the calaboose—his offense being that he had got beastly intoxicated, taken possession of the main street and proudly proclaimed that he was "chief," and that any two-legged critter that wanted to pass must fight for it.

After the story of the stranger's victory over Yuba had been pretty well circulated around town, quite a number of the citizens considered it their duty to call upon the new-comer and tender him the hospitalities of the city; as they justly argued, it was the duty of the citizens of Cinnabar to make the stranger feel at home.

It was noticed, afterward, as a curious coincidence, that each one of the men who had intimated that it was the right thing to call upon the stranger possessed an A No. 1 reputation as a poker-player, and that, just about that time, they had unaccountably run out of cards and required fresh packs.

It was remarked, too, by some wise heads who made it a point to note what was going on, that, for some days after their interview with the stranger, each and every one of the miners was "short" on the money question, and seemed to have a strange aversion to card-playing, and when questioned regarding Mr. Brown, one and all had given their opinion that his taking up his quarters among them would be of no benefit to the city at large.

Brown had gone on in the even tenor of his way, paying no regard to the talk in relation to him. When some of the sayings were reported to him, he had simply observed that if men would go round trying to pick up "flats," they mustn't complain if they got picked up themselves, once in a while.

The stranger made a very faint pretense of working his claim, but as his predecessors had never been able to extract any gold out of the "Clear-grit" by hard work, it was hardly to be expected that Mr. Brown would succeed in making the claim pay "fooling" with it, as a practical miner would have tersely said.

Within a very short time it was quite plain that Mr. Brown depended more upon card-playing for a living than he did upon gold-mining.

"The Death Shot of Shasta!" exclaimed Brown, overhearing the sentence as he entered the saloon; "that's a strange title to give a man."

Another peculiar thing about the stranger was his voice; it was weak and feeble, and with a childish treble to it, evidently one of the results of the terrible wound which he had received and which had so dreadfully disfigured his face.

Mack turned an inquiring glance upon Brown; he was not particularly civil to strangers, but from the

description he recognized the "Clear-grit Sharp," as Brown was generally termed, and as the veteran stage-driver felt a very high degree of respect for the man who had so handsomely cleaned out Yuba Bill, he volunteered to explain. So he again related the story of the white rider stopping the express and the narrow escape from death of the new landlord of the Occidental.

"I tell yer, gents, ef it hadn't a-bin fur the leetle gal, he would hev plugged him, sure!" Mack exclaimed, as a wind-up.

Brown seemed to be pondering over the story. It was really wonderful the interest he took in it.

"And he rode off when he saw the girl?" he asked thoughtfully.

"You bet!" cried Mack, emphatically; "why, he lit out instanter. You couldn't see his hoss's heels for dust."

"What is your opinion about this man?" Brown asked, putting the question directly to the driver.

"Oh, it's the old road-agent dodge," answered Mack. "They allers make it a p'int to kiver up their faces an' rig out in queer toggery."

"I reckon I'll have to see the landlord," Brown observed. "I feel quite an interest in this Death Shot."

Then Brown departed, leaving a vague suspicion behind him.

CHAPTER X.

MR. BROWN SEEKS INFORMATION.

Brown proceeded up-stairs directly to the private room of the landlord of the Occidental.

In answer to his knock at the door, the voice of Yorker bade him enter.

The landlord and his niece were seated together in the apartment, Yorker engaged in reading a newspaper and the girl sewing. Yorker looked a little surprised when he saw his visitor; Brown was a stranger to him; the new landlord of the Occidental was not very well acquainted with the inhabitants of his new home, not having had time to become so.

"I trust that you will excuse my intrusion," Brown said, bowing as he entered the apartment.

"Certainly, sir," Yorker replied, rising as he spoke, and handing the stranger a chair.

Brown sat down and cast an inquiring glance upon the young girl.

"Your niece, I suppose, Mr. Yorker?" he observed.

"Yes, sir."

"I have taken the liberty of waiting upon you to get the full particulars of the attack upon the express to-day."

Yorker looked a little surprised.

"I feel a great deal of interest in the matter," Brown explained. "My name is Brown, Alexander Brown; I'm the owner of the Clear-grit claim. I speculate a leetle, once in a while, and the idea occurred to me that I might be able to make a stake out of this white-rider business."

"I really don't understand," Yorker said.

"Why, if this road-agent keeps on stopping stages, thar'll probably be a reward offered for him before long, and a man might make a good thing out of it."

"Oh, yes, I see."

"Have you any idea who this man is?"

"No."

"Not the slightest suspicion?"

"No."

"If I heard the story of the stage-driver rightly, this Death Shot of Shasta said that he had an old quarrel to settle with you."

"No, not with me," Yorker replied, hastily; "he mixed me up with another man."

"Yes, one Jimmy Hughes, who used to run a saloon in this yere town about three or four years ago, maybe five."

Yorker looked astonished at the knowledge of the stranger.

"Yes, I believe that that was the name he mentioned," the landlord answered, very reluctantly.

"I suppose that you don't know anything about this Jimmy Hughes?" Brown asked, fixing his cold, sharp eyes upon the landlord's face.

"No, sir," Yorker answered, quite shortly.

"And you haven't any idea why this man should mistake you for Jimmy Hughes?"

"No idea at all, sir."

"Perhaps you never heard of this Jimmy Hughes?" Brown observed, in an absent sort of way.

The landlord got quite red in the face, and for a moment seemed quite at a loss for words. Brown watched him out of one corner of his eye, while pretending to be deeply engaged in tracing the line of a crack upon the uncarpeted floor.

"No, sir, I never heard of any such man," Yorker replied, at last, striving to conceal his confusion and to appear quite at ease.

"It's kinder strange," Brown observed, speaking as if he had made the remark more for his own benefit than for the ears of the other two who sat within the room.

"Yes, sir; it is a very strange affair, and I confess I do not understand it at all."

"I reckon that he would have killed you if it hadn't a-bin for miss, yere, interfering."

"I think that he would."

"And all because you were Jimmy Hughes—or, that he thought you were Hughes."

"Yes, sir; no other reason that I know of."

"Hain't you got any enemy that might want to git squar' with you?" Brown questioned.

"None to my knowledge."

"And this road-agent said something about the Cinnabar mine that used to be run in this yere town; do you know anything about that affair?"

"I have heard something about it," the landlord replied, just a little evasively.

"People that know, say that it was a bloody affair," Brown persisted. "I thought, though, that all the parties mixed up in the fight were dead."

"I supposed so, too," Yorker added, incautiously, and then, the moment after, regretted that he had spoken.

"Of course you had no interest in the thing?"

"None at all," the landlord hastened to say.

Brown rose as if to depart.

"I s'pose that you wouldn't be able to identify this road-agent if you saw him?"

"No, sir; I do not think that I would. His disguise was perfect; I could see nothing but his eyes—"

"And what color were they?" demanded Brown, suddenly, interrupting the landlord in his speech.

Yorker was puzzled; in vain he tasked his memory; for the life of him he couldn't tell what was the color of the piercing orbs which shone through the white hood that had covered the face and head of the masked road-agent.

"They were dark, I am sure," he said, "but whether blue, brown or black is more than I can say."

"Perhaps, miss, you noticed what kind of eyes he had?"

"No, sir," she replied; "I was too frightened to notice anything except my uncle's danger."

"If I heard the thing correctly, he ran away when you jumped from the hack an' came up to your uncle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any idea why the road-agent should be skeered of this young lady?" directing his conversation again to the landlord.

"No, sir, I have not; the whole proceeding, from beginning to end, is a mystery to me."

"You feel pretty sure that you wouldn't be able to pick this fellow out if you were to meet him, say right in the hotel yere?" Brown was strangely interested upon this point.

"No, sir, I feel confident that I could not," Yorker answered, decidedly. "He disguised his voice as well as his person. I might drink with him, sir, at the same bar, and I am sure that I wouldn't know him."

"Well, I'm much obliged," Brown said, backing through the door as he spoke. "If I find out anything about this fellow, I'll come an' let you know. I s'pose that you wouldn't mind attending his funeral?"

"I bear no malice to him!" the landlord exclaimed, hastily; "he did me no damage, and I don't wish to mix myself up in a quarrel with him. If he will let me alone, I am perfectly content."

"Good-evening," said Brown, laconically, and then he closed the door behind him.

Yorker paced up and down the room for a few minutes; his face fully betrayed a high nervous excitement. The girl watched him anxiously.

"Oh, I was mad to come back to this place!" he exclaimed.

"You have been here before, uncle?" the girl questioned, in astonishment.

"Yes, my dear; I will not attempt to conceal the truth from you; I am the James Hughes that that masked man was in search of. I used to run a saloon here a few years ago. I became involved very heavily, some ten years back, in New York, and came West to avoid my creditors. I changed my name and called myself Hughes, for fear I should be pursued. I was mixed up in the Cinnabar mine affair. I was Mayor of the town then, and was forced into it. But since that time all this section has been the seat of an Indian war, and I did not believe that a single one of the old settlers remained. I had a good chance to buy out this place cheap, and I did not think that, after the lapse of years, any one would be apt to recognize me under another name. It is evident, though, that I have been recognized, and by an enemy that seeks my life."

"Do you suppose that this man has a concealed motive in calling upon you?" the girl asked, thoughtfully.

"Yes, yes; why, the chances are ten to one that he is a tool of this masked road-agent; he may be the road-agent himself. His face is familiar to me despite its disfigurement."

Long and earnestly the twain pondered over the difficult question.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CALABOOSE.

WITHIN the limits of the calaboose reposed the stalwart form of Yuba William.

Ten dollars or ten days had been the sentence imposed upon the playful Yuba by a low-spirited judge who did not appreciate the chivalric nature that, under the influence of the potent tanglefoot, had inspired the son of Yuba's town to doff his beaver, take possession of the main street, and gallantly offer to fight any two-legged critter that objected to the proceeding.

Dollars Yuba had not; days he possessed in plenty, and so in the calaboose he lingered.

Straight from the Occidental Hotel to the city prison Brown went, deeply musing as he walked along.

"It is Jimmy Hughes," he muttered—"changed a little, but still the same Jimmy Hughes that used to run the Dry-up saloon yere in the old time. I thought that I couldn't be mistaken; my judgment is seldom deceived. He lives and has come back to Cinnabar; perhaps another lives, too—perhaps he is in Cinnabar—an' if he is, mebbe thar'll be a reopening of the old account? No man ever yet wronged me an' lived to boast much of it."

Dark grew the brows of the miner-sport, and clenched were his fists, as he gave utterance to the words. Involuntarily his steps quickened and he strode along faster in the gloom, as the dark and bitter thoughts came trooping into his mind. Back came the memories of the past; the long-contested struggle, with its bloody conclusion, was as fresh in his mind as though it had but happened yesterday.

"I'm on the right track, I'm sure!" he muttered, "but before many weeks are over I'll be certain."

By this time Brown had reached the calaboose. It was a strongly-built two-story shanty.

The sheriff of Cinnabar City, Ben Tyler, or Big Ben, as he was generally termed, was lounging in front of the door in company with the jailer, both smoking pipes and discussing the prospects for the future of the Cinnabar metropolis.

"Good-evening," said Brown, halting in front of the door of the jail.

"Good-evening," replied the sheriff and the jailer, both of whom had the proper respect for the man who had flaxed out the majority of the best poker-players in the city.

"How's Yuba?"

"Savage as blazes!" replied the sheriff, sententiously.

"Couldn't be worse ef he'd been feedin' on wild-cats," the jailer remarked.

"It's kinder rough on Yuba," the sheriff observed, reflectively. "If he had taken any other time but broad daylight to clean out the street, nary gentl'man could have said anything ag'in' it."

"Why, I've know'd Pat Mulligan to hold the street

for two hours at night, an' nobody said anything at all. The boys didn't call for no officer to put his nose in the matter; no, sir! One of the fellows would take a club an' jes' sail into Mulligan, an' whale him till he was ready to quit, an' that settled the matter without any disturbance," the jailer said.

"How many more days has he got?"

"Three," the sheriff replied.

"And won't none of the boys 'put up' for him?" Mr. Brown asked.

"Wa-al, meaning no disrespect to you, Mr. Brown," the sheriff said, "the boys ain't quite so flush as they were afore you came to town."

Brown smiled—a faint, sickly sort of smile which only served to make his disfigured face look more hideous.

"Playin' ain't good for 'em," he said; "an' if I bu'st 'em they can't gamble."

"That's so!" exclaimed the sheriff, struck by the solid sense of the remark.

"I s'pose I kin see Yuba?"

"Guess thar ain't no law ag'in' it," the sheriff replied, glancing at the jailer.

"Oh, you're welcome," that individual answered; "walk in, mebbe it will kinder cheer him up."

"I'm much obliged," and Brown, accepting the invitation, entered the confines of the calaboose.

"A right smart chap," the sheriff observed, to the jailer, as the door closed behind Brown.

Yuba was seated in the calaboose intently occupied in watching a tallow candle upon the table. This luxury was practical proof of the jailer's sympathy for the prisoner.

Yuba looked up and was considerably astonished when he saw who was his visitor.

"How are you, Yuba?" and Brown extended his hand which the prisoner immediately clasped in his huge paw.

"Wa-al, I ain't over an' above well," Yuba admitted. "I reckon that seven days in this hyer shanty is enuff to make any galoot feel holler."

"It ain't very inviting," Brown remarked, seating himself carelessly upon a corner of the table.

"Invitin' blazes!" growled Yuba, disconsolately.

"I reckon I'd a heap rather be in—"

"Oh, you'll get there soon enough!" Brown remarked, dryly, interrupting the speech.

"Say, now, ef you can't say anything better'n that you better git up and dust!" exclaimed Yuba, savagely.

"I reckon, Bill, that you're pretty hard up," Brown said, quietly, paying no attention whatever to the sulky manner of the other.

"Wa-al, I reckon I am, but what's that to you?"

"Can't you fork over ten dollars?"

"Would I be hyer if I could?" demanded Yuba; "I tell you what it is, you Clear-grit Sharp, ef it wasn't fur the respect that I hev for the law of this hyer town, I'd go to work an' pick the hull end-board outen this hyer durned old shanty!" And the gentle William glared around ferociously at the walls as he spoke.

"Won't any friend go ten dollars on you?"

"Ef they would I wouldn't be hyer," Bill replied.

"Friends air a heap good when a man don't want 'em, but when he does, they're like the little joker at three-card monte, thar's no tellin' whar he is."

"Yuba, I'm goin' to put up ten dollars on you."

The redoubtable William only stared.

"That's so," Brown continued, "an' thar's the money; that talks!" He laid a gold-piece down on the table as he spoke.

"Spread your wings and crow, you durned old eagle!" Yuba exclaimed, as he picked up the gold-piece, "for I'm going to quit this hyer shanty!"

"That'll put you through," Brown observed.

"Correct you air!"

Then a sudden thought occurred to Yuba.

"Hold on, pardner; mebbe you want something for this?"

"Right you are; that's my game."

"Start your wheel; I'm bettin'."

"I want about five men who fear neither man nor devil; who will do jest exactly what I say without asking any questions, an' I'll guarantee that they shall be mighty well paid."

"That's your platform?" queried Bill.

"That's my lay-out!"

"I'm your heifer!" exclaimed Yuba, decidedly, "an' as fur the five men, I kin git you twenty-five ef you say the word."

"No, five is enough."

"Say, pardner, is the biz all straight—no road-agent dodge 'bout it?" Yuba demanded.

"Well, s'pose thar is?"

"Nothin', only I'll have to be mighty 'ticular what men I pick up. Thar's the risk of bein' caught, you know. The durned blue-coats go fur the road-agents now."

"I'll see that there shall be no danger of any of the party stretchin' a rope," Brown said. "Ag'in' bullets an' bowie-knives, though, they must take the chances."

"That's all squar'. I kin git men that will risk that."

"Mind you, I can promise a fortune to each man of the five."

"Honest?" asked Yuba, doubtfully.

"They shall receive regular wages, say five dollars per day to each man, an' a share in the plunder besides."

"All right; I'll jine issue with you, old man!"

"Can you bring the men to my shanty to-morrow night?"

"I bet yer!"

Within an hour Yuba was a free man and on the scent.

CHAPTER XII.

UGLY'S DREAM.

WHEN the Sunday sun came down clear and strong through the single window of the wing-dam shanty, old Joe Ugly opened his eyes and glared vacantly around him for a moment.

Elinore was standing with her back toward her father, bending over the fire-place preparing the scanty breakfast.

The old man had slept all night upon the floor in the exact spot where he had fallen.

The beams of the sun dazzled the bleared eyes of the drunkard for a moment, and he winked and blinked after the fashion of an owl, who had been suddenly torn from his home in the gnarled tree and forced to look upon the

"Where am I?"

Often had old Joe Ugly asked that question when waking to consciousness after a protracted spree, and the barred door of the "lock-up" cell had answered it.

A look of satisfaction came over old Joe's face when he saw that he was safe at home. He had sat upright and rubbed his eyes. The movement attracted the attention of the girl, and, turning, she faced her father.

"Gettin' breakfast, Nelly?" he asked, with a forced smile, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for him to spend the night upon the floor instead of in his bed.

"Yes," answered the girl, as quiet and as statue-like as usual.

"Well, I feel kinder hungry and awful thirsty, too," and the old man puckered his dry lips together. "Nell, what have you got for breakfast?"

"Very little, indeed," Elinore replied; "some salt pork, fried, and a few little cakes that I've baked on the hearth."

"Little!" cried the old man; "do you call that little? Why, Nelly, we ought to be thankful that we have got so much. Just think of the many times that we have breakfasted on bread and water, just enough to keep life in us. We ought to be thankful to the good Providence that gives me strength to earn salt pork and hot cakes; sides, I always did like fried salt pork. It reminds me of my boyish days when I used to go fishing and fry my fish in the woods by the side of the water. Many a king, Nell, will sit down this very morning and eat all the savory viands of the world from golden dishes with much less relish than your poor, old, unfortunate father will devour his salt pork, cheered by the sight of his girl's sweet face. Here in this humble home we have peace and contentment; better is a dinner of yams and peace thereof than a stalled ox and—well I forget the rest of it." And then, with the assistance of the wall, old Ugly proceeded to rise.

Elinore turned and resumed her care of the breakfast.

The old fellow balanced himself against the wall of the shanty; his legs were still unsteady after the night's debauch.

"I must have slept too hard," he muttered; "I've got quite a pain in my head."

It was little wonder considering the ugly clip on the skull he had received on his way home the previous night, and of which he remembered nothing.

"I had a most astonishing dream last night," the old man said, evidently striving to recall the events of the past night. "A most astonishing dream," he repeated. "I dreamed that I went down to the city as usual, and after I sold my 'dust' I dropped into the Occidental to hear what the news was, and there I found a party of gentlemen playing cards. They invited me to join them, and just for the fun of the thing I sat down and took a hand. It was a sharp party, too, Nell, the A. No. 1 poker-men of the town; but your poor old father wasn't afraid to sit down with them, for although I say it myself, Nelly, there isn't many of them can play cards with your father, even if he has been unfortunate. Well, as I was saying, I dreamed I sat down and took a hand in the game, and I could see 'em look at each other, Nell, as much as to say, 'Now, just look out, for the old man knows a thing or two about cards, even if luck does run against him once in a while.' It was just as real, Nelly, as though it all happened. There was five in the party—I dreamed it all just as clear and distinct—there was Cherokee—he's a fellow with a big beard, a gentleman, too—the best card-player in the valley they say—then Judge Bob Candy, and Sandy Rocks, and two gentlemen unknown to me. And as I sat down, Nelly, I heard one of the 'boys' behind me—you see I dreamed that there was quite a little crowd watching the game—well, I heard this miner say in an undertone, 'Look out for fun now, for the old man—that's me, Nell—the old man is a-goin' for 'em.' And then we played, and we played; and they set up the drinks like gentlemen, and they wouldn't let me pay a single cent. Then I thought it was getting near twelve and there was only time for a game or so more. The cards had been running against me; whenever I got a really good hand there was always somebody in the party that held a little better one and took the money. I had just about enough left to make a decent bet, and I felt that it was my last chance that night, and would you believe it, Nelly, I could only get a little pair—a little pair, my dear, ain't of much account in poker, but I just socked in as if I had held four aces, and I skeered them all, Nell, all except Cherokee. All the rest 'passed,' but he stayed 'in.' Then I raised him for all I had; and I frightened him, Nelly; your poor old father frightened him. He didn't dare to put up his money and claim a sight for it, but he backed out, and I won the pile; won it on a leetle pair." And the old man chuckled at the remembrance of his supposed dream.

"Then the party broke up; they were all afraid to play after that. I gathered up the money and started to come home; I had the groceries in my arms just the same as usual; I stepped out of the door into the night, and then you know there came a sort of blank, and I s'pose I woke up."

Into the mind of the girl, bending over the fire, came a sudden thought. The old man believed that the events of the night were but the fancies of a dreamer; why not let him continue in the belief? She felt sure that if he knew he had money he would go straight to town and gamble it away. At the first thought she resolved not to say a word to remove his error, but then she reflected that, sooner or later, he would learn the truth, and in reality she shrunk from the deception.

"A most remarkable dream," the old gambler added, as he sat down upon a box and proceeded to run his fingers through his scraggy gray locks, smoothing them away from his forehead.

"It is not a dream, father," the girl said, turning the hissing pork from the frying-pan to a tin platter as she spoke.

"Not a dream, Nelly?" he cried, excitedly, rising in trembling agitation.

"No, father."

"Did I bring home any money last night?" he demanded, glaring eagerly around him as he spoke.

"Yes."

"Aha! didn't I tell you I'd fetch them sometime?"

old Joe cried, in trembling glee. "Where is the money—where is it—safe, I hope?"

The buck-skin-covered treasure stood exactly where Cherokee had placed it only a few hours before, but the girl had covered it with the weather-worn hat of her father. Lifting up the hat, she displayed the evidence of victory.

Eagerly the old man crossed the room and caressed the soft buck-skin that held prisoner the golden grains.

"I knew that luck couldn't always run against me!" he exclaimed. "I was a fool to stop playing; why, I might have won two or three thousand dollars while I was in the vein; but, perhaps it is not too late."

And as he muttered the words, he commenced to crowd the money into his pocket.

The girl understood his purpose only too well.

"Won't you have some breakfast before you go?" she asked.

"No, no, Nell; when the luck runs, minutes are worth hours; you're a woman; you don't understand such matters; don't bother me!"

"You are not going to gamble on Sunday, father?"

"No, of course not, my dear," he replied, just a little shame-faced; "although the better the day, the better the deed, you know." The miserable old wretch was unwilling to confess the truth. "I'm only going to get some breakfast fit for a gentleman. I hate salt pork; it always makes me sick; my stomach is too delicate; don't you eat it; I'll bring you something nice from town; good-by." And then old Joe hurried away for Cinnabar City as fast as he could go.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OMINOUS WARNING.

SPENCER WAITE, Mayor of the City of Cinnabar, sat in his private apartment.

It was on the same Saturday evening that old Joe Ugly had sought the poker-players in the Occidental Hotel.

Waite was the owner of the largest store in Cinnabar City; a thrifty State of Maine man, he had prospered exceedingly well in his far Western home; rather sharp and hardy by nature—partaking of the qualities of the granite rocks of his native State in that respect—he was just the sort of man to succeed in a new community.

Spence Waite—as he was generally termed—was a tolerably popular man. He was the first Mayor Cinnabar City had had since the time of the Indian difficulties, and at the period of which we write, he had held office some six months.

Waite owned quite a stately building—one of the largest in town; his store occupied the lower story, while the upper was divided into two rooms, the front one fitted up as the Mayor's office, and the rear arranged as a sleeping apartment.

The latter was occupied by Mayor Waite on the night of which we write.

He sat in the center of the apartment—a burly, gray-eyed, sandy-haired, lantern-jawed man—an open letter in his hand, and he was diligently engaged in perusing it, by the light of a couple of candles that burned on the table near him.

At his back, two open windows—for the night-air was balmy and refreshing—looked out upon the river, and the bush-covered hillside beyond, that hemmed in the valley.

Dark and earnest was the face of the Mayor; and as he read and re-read the brief letter, a dozen times, at least, his face plainly betrayed that he was growing more and more puzzled.

The letter was extremely brief, as we have hinted, very much to the point, and quite likely to bewilder even a shrewder head than that which sat upon the shoulders of Spencer Waite, Mayor of Cinnabar City.

It read as follows, written in a plain, bold hand:

"TO SPENCER WAITE, Mayor of the City of Cinnabar: 'Beware! The demon of vengeance is abroad! You are marked as a victim! Resign your mayorship, or die.'"

Was it a wonder that a document couched in such language should puzzle the chief executive officer of the young metropolis of the Shasta Valley?

Waite could make neither head nor tail of it.

After the store had closed—that was about nine o'clock—he had taken a stroll down the street as far as the Occidental Hotel; had stepped in, taken a couple of drinks with a few friends, chatted a bit, then had come straight to his apartment, with the intention of retiring for the night. Unlocking the door, which was secured by as fine a lock as there was in town, he had entered, lighted his candles—two of them, as he intended to read a little before retiring—and then, to his utter surprise, he had discovered the mysterious document spread out upon the table in the center of the room.

His first thought had been that it was a hoax—that some of the "boys" were disposed to have a little fun at his expense—but how the person, who had left the document, had managed to gain entrance to the closely-locked room was a mystery. If the door had been secured by a common lock, he understood that it might be unfastened by a duplicate key, but as the lock was a patent concern, with a double tumbler, almost defying the skill of an expert pick-lock, it was too much for him.

The paper had not evidently been thrown in through the windows, for it was spread out nicely and neatly upon the table. Nor was it hardly possible that any one could have gained entrance to the room through the windows, for they were ten or twelve feet from the ground.

"What on earth does it mean?" Waite cried, perplexed. "If it ain't a joke, what is it? I can't understand it a bit. I was not aware that I had any enemies that would go quite so far as this." And then Waite fell to studying the paper again, as though he hoped to find a solution of the mystery in the innocent looking page.

A knock at the door of the apartment startled Waite, and such was the impression that the paper had produced upon him, that the worthy Mayor actually felt for his revolver. Even the Mayor of Cinnabar City went "heeled," to use the lingo of the "far Pacific slope."

"Come in," said the Mayor, ready to draw his weapon if the visitor boded danger.

The door opened, and the Sheriff, Big Ben Tyler,

appeared, much to the relief of the worthy Mayor, to relate the exact truth.

"Hallo, Ben, is that you?" was the Mayor's welcome.

"All that is left of me," replied the sheriff, thus neatly edging in his favorite joke.

The sheriff advanced, took the chair that his honor the Mayor had pushed over to him with his foot, and sat down.

Waite had laid the threatening communication upon the table at the entrance of the sheriff, and had turned his attention to his visitor. Something important evidently had occurred to bring Ben there at that hour.

The Mayor noticed that Tyler's face wore a very serious expression—rather odd for the burly sheriff, who usually was as stolid as an ox.

"It's a warm night—for this time o' year," Tyler observed, and with a reflective glance through the window upon the shining bosom of the river and the dark hills beyond.

"Yes, it is rather warm."

"Town's pretty quiet," Mr. Tyler said, gazing vacantly up at the ceiling.

"Yes, very quiet."

"That Clear-grit sharp bailed out Bill Yuba this evening," the sheriff remarked.

"Indeed?" Waite understood very clearly that these observations were but intended to clear the way for the business upon which the sheriff had come.

"Say, Mister Mayor, what do you think of me as a sheriff, anyway?" blurted out Tyler, suddenly.

Waite looked rather astonished at the question.

"Well, I don't exactly understand what you are driving at," he replied, slowly.

"Am I a one-horse sheriff, or am I a hull team and a dog under the wagon?" demanded Tyler, getting very red in the face.

"I think that you fill the bill," Waite answered, totally at a loss to account for the strange behavior of the other, and half-inclined to suspect that the doughty sheriff had been drinking too freely.

"I hev tried to do the thing up brown!" Tyler exclaimed, excitedly; "I have run the machine as well as I knew how, and the man that says I didn't is a liar and a horse-thief!"

"What's the matter—what's happened?" demanded Waite, considerably astonished at the violence of Big Ben.

"Jes' you read this," and the sheriff took a paper from his pocket and shoved it into Waite's hand; "jes' you read it. I'm goin' to resign, I am; that's my platform!"

"Where did you get this?" the Mayor asked, glancing over the paper.

"Some durned galoot put it into my pocket unbeknown to me," Tyler answered, savagely. "I went to take out my tobacco a while ago, and I hauled out that thing instead. I s'pose that some of the boys may be playin' roots on me, but I'd like to ketch the man that did it!"

The only answer Waite made was to take the mysterious paper he had found in his room and place it in Tyler's hands.

The sheriff uttered an exclamation of astonishment. The two papers were exactly alike except in the directions.

And as the two men sat gazing at each other, pondering over the mystery, an arrow whizzed in through the open window, and, striking the partition-wall, remained quivering in the wood into which the head had penetrated.

Wonder-struck, Waite jumped up and examined the arrow. A paper was wrapped tightly around its center. Waite opened it, and the strange signature first caught his eyes; bold and distinct were the letters:

"The Death Shot of Shasta."

CHAPTER XIV.

A TRAP FOR THE DEATH SHOT.

"INJUNS, by thunder!" cried the sheriff, dropping down upon all-fours so as to get out of range of the windows and drawing his revolver from its holster as he spoke.

"Nary Injun," replied Waite, laconically, proceeding to unroll the paper wrapped around the arrow. Then he read the document aloud.

"SPENCER WAITE and BENJAMIN TYLER, respectively Mayor and Sheriff of the City of Cinnabar:

"Resign your offices or die! The arm of the avenger is raised to give the death-blow. Within a week the stroke will fall. No malice is borne against either of you personally, but it is decreed that Cinnabar City shall have neither mayor nor sheriff. Resign and live; hold and die. Think not that this is but mere bravado. If either of you have the courage to come unarmed and alone to the McCloud canyon, three miles east of the city of Cinnabar, Monday night at nine o'clock, the avenger will come in his own proper person and speak with you.

"(Signed) THE DEATH SHOT OF SHASTA."

Tyler listened attentively and his face betrayed that he was utterly astounded by the strange communication. He rose slowly to his feet.

"What do you think of it?" the Mayor inquired, finding that the sheriff did not speak.

"You are too much for me, boss," Tyler returned, with a shake of his big head.

"It don't exactly seem like a practical joke, yet it may be that some of the boys are trying to have a little fun at our expense," Waite said, thoughtfully.

The sheriff doubled up his huge fists wrathfully at the very idea.

"I'd jes' like to ketch some of 'em at it," he muttered; "I reckon that I would tackle the galoots, even if I had to arrest myself for a breach of the peace afterwards."

Waite smiled at the idea.

"I don't believe that this is a joke. How the deuce could any one get in my room here to leave this warning? I haven't mentioned it before, but I found the paper, directed to me, lying on the table when I came in, only a few minutes back. The door was locked, too, and the key in my pocket."

"Oh, it's no use!" said Tyler, in utter despair; "I ain't a-tryin' to guess it; it's too much for me, I gi'n the thing clear up."

"And then this arrow, too, shot in through the window," and the Mayor approached the casement as he spoke. "From the point it struck, it is evident

to me that it must have come from the other side of the river.

"Look out the cuss don't put another arrow through you!" Tyler exclaimed, in alarm.

"Oh, I reckon there's no danger; the warning gives us time, you know; we've got a week's grace. I don't believe there's a white man in town who could have shot that arrow with so true an aim."

"It's a red, sure!" the sheriff ejaculated.

"But no red-skin wrote these letters!" the Mayor protested.

"Correct," replied Tyler, and then a sudden idea occurred to him. "Maybe it's a white man and an Injun a-goin' cahoots."

Waite shook his head doubtfully, although, to tell the truth, he had no idea of his own upon the subject.

"Do you know the place spoken of in this communication—the McCloud canyon?" the Mayor asked.

"Oh, yes; I've bin up thar three or four times."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"Wa-al, it's more a gully than a canyon; it's up the river."

"Not settled at all, is it?"

"Nary time."

"Tyler, I've got an idea about this business!" the Mayor exclaimed, abruptly.

"Spit it out," said the sheriff, laconically.

"Now this whole thing may be a huge joke got up by some of the boys, and then again maybe it isn't. We shall never know which until we find out."

"Gospel truth, Mister Mayor!"

"Suppose you go to this McCloud canyon Monday night?"

The sheriff stared.

"Oh, I mean it," Waite hastened to say.

"But hold on, old man!" Tyler exclaimed; "s'pose some galoot has got a grudge ag'in' me an' this hyer is all a put-up job to get me away from the town?"

"Tyler, my boy, can't you take half a dozen good men with you?" Waite asked, significantly.

"Oho! I smell a mice!" cried Tyler; "you want me to go and draw the galoot out?"

"Exactly, and I will be behind with the men. If it is a joke, all well and good; we're sold, that's all; but if it ain't a joke, and this party means mischief, we'll catch him in his own trap."

"Bully for us!" exclaimed the sheriff, emphatically.

"I think this little thing will work," the Mayor remarked, complacently.

"I bet you it will."

"You must get six good men, and see that they are all well 'heeled.'"

"I'll look out for it," Tyler replied, with a knowing nod. "But, see hyer, old man, this cuss may suspect the trap and not put in an appearance," he added, the thought just occurring to him.

"There is no reason why he should suspect, if we keep the matter quiet. Don't mention a word about the affair. Just pick out one man and let him get the rest. I'll tell you how you can fix it. Let the man you pick out pretend that the party is going down to Angel's Bar to play poker; no one need know that either you or I have anything to do with the affair."

"That's so!" exclaimed Tyler, shortly. "Wa-al, I git. I'll fix things up all right, Monday, and I'll drop in and see you Monday afternoon; so-long!"

The sheriff departed.

Waite locked the door after him; then went to the windows and closed the shutters. He did not relish being a target for some concealed foe posted upon the hillside beyond the river. The force with which the arrow had struck the wood of the partition wall, fully satisfied the Mayor of Cinnabar that if the dart had been directed against his own portly and well-preserved person it would have done him considerable damage.

Waite sat down and reflected upon the strange affair, but the more he thought about the matter, the greater grew the puzzle, so at last he gave up the subject in despair and went to bed.

The sheriff, after leaving the Mayor's apartment, proceeded leisurely down the street toward the jail, over which he had his quarters.

Being of a grosser mind than Waite, the matter did not affect him so much. He had perfect confidence that the scheme to entrap the writer of the mysterious communications would succeed, and so already had ceased to worry about it.

Greeting his friends with kindly nods as he passed on, he started down the street until he came opposite to the Occidental Hotel, and, standing in front of that celebrated hostelry, he saw the very man he wanted—Dandy Jim, the Red-Dogite.

"You're the man for my money!" exclaimed the sheriff, and then he briefly explained to Jim what he wanted.

"Bout five keardless fellers, you know; needn't say that I'm going to be in the thing, 'cos it might spile some fun. A poker-party down to the Bar, you know. Tell the boys to come well 'heeled,' 'cos thar's wolves atween hyer and the Bar and maybe they might bite."

"Sport, is thar some fun in the b'ilin'?" asked the man-from-Red-Dog, impressively, laying his hand upon the brawny shoulder of the sheriff.

"Lots!" replied the official.

"Count me in, tooth and toe-nails!" said Dandy Jim, with due solemnity.

"Drop in and see me arter you fix things," Tyler remarked as he passed on.

A deep-laid trap to catch the mysterious white rider, the Death Shot of Shasta, but would it succeed?

CHAPTER XV. CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

With a sorrowful heart the girl saw her father depart; words she knew were useless, so she did not attempt to remonstrate with him. While he had a single cent of money in his possession the gambling-table offered him inducements that could not be resisted.

To win back what he had lost, such was his idea; the fatal desire that has wrecked so many noble lives.

As the old man had often said: "Let me once get even, or even win a heavy stake—something worth the winning, and I will never touch a card again."

But to the infatuated gamester that golden moment never comes. If by any lucky chance he

should succeed in winning heavily, then he continues to play that he may increase his gains, and so, in the end, loses the little advantage that fickle fortune, in her blind, uncertain way, happened to bestow.

The old man disappeared in the distance, and Elinore, with a half-sigh, closed the door, crossed the room to the rude table whereon the scanty breakfast was spread, and gazed upon the work of her white hands, a strange expression upon her face.

Possibly, for the moment, bitter thoughts were in her mind; the weight of the cross she bore galled her heavily.

The sigh that rose to her lips spoke volumes.

And as she stood, gazing upon the glowing embers of the fire, despair in her heart, pulling down her eyelids and tugging at her heart, the report of a gun, discharged quite near to the house, startled her from her reverie.

Then there came a bang at the door, as though some light substance had been thrown violently against it.

The girl hastened to open the door. Upon the threshold lay a dead rabbit, but no human being was in sight. Afar off up on the hillside, though, the girl detected a little cloud of white smoke curling upward on the air. To her mind at once came the solution of the riddle. The hunter had fired at the rabbit in the shrubbery, and the flying animal had strength enough left to reach the shanty before death had overtaken it; though why the rabbit should flee to the house was beyond her comprehension.

Looking to the hillside, she endeavored to discover the hunter, but the stillness of the wilderness reigned there, and no sign could she discover that denoted the presence of a human being near at hand.

This was not the first time that this mysterious thing had occurred.

Twice during the past week she had heard the report of a gun, and afterward had discovered the dead game lying near the door; and what was still more strange, no sportsman had appeared to claim the spoils.

Old Ugly had never troubled his head much about the matter; he had ordered the game cooked, and had eaten heartily of it, and eased his mind by remarking that "maybe" the sportsman only cared for shooting, and not for the products of his skill.

The girl, deep in the rooted sorrow of her life, had not weighed the matter in her mind, but now she plainly perceived how impossible it was that the rabbit, stricken near to death, should hurl himself at the door, four feet or so from the ground, for she had distinctly heard the rabbit strike the upper part of the door and then fall to the earth. There was human agency in the affair, and she resolved to unravel the mystery.

She stooped and picked up the rabbit. The animal was stone-cold; evidently he had been dead for hours—days, perhaps.

Elinore withdrew into the cottage and closed the door behind her. Casting the rabbit upon the table, she knelt down at the door, and through a crack, where the shrunken boards had parted, she looked out upon the open country.

Ten, twenty minutes at least, she remained motionless upon her knees, eagerly watching the hillside from which she had seen the white smoke curling lazily up on the air.

Within the shrubbery she felt sure the man who fired the shot was ensconced.

At last patience was rewarded. Out from the grove of pine and juniper projected a head. A big, honest, good-natured-looking head, crowned by a shock of tangled yellow hair, and that surmounted by a battered-up slouch hat. A long and bushy beard, like in hue to the lion's tawny mane, fringed his round red cheeks.

Not at all the head of a ruffian—a road-agent, or any other desperado, but rather the head of a brawny butcher intent upon playing a fine practical joke upon a comrade. A broad grin was upon the face, and a merry twinkle in the clear blue eyes.

Elinore recognized the man at once.

Six times at least since she had been domiciled in the wing-dam shanty, the brawny stranger had stopped and held converse with her.

The first time, he had been in search of a stray hog; the second, he had stopped to inform her that he had found the pig. The third time, he was in quest of a man named Jones, and stopped to ask if she knew of any "sich" man. The next day he returned, for the fourth time, to say that he had discovered that the person he was in search of, and whom he knew as Jones, was sometimes called Old Nutmeg—the party was from Connecticut—and "maybe" she knew him under that name. On the fifth visit, he was prospecting for a good place to locate, and had called to inquire how things were in that locality, and on the sixth occasion, he had called to know if they didn't wish to buy a pig.

And now, as Elinore watched the head of the man, framed in the green of the leafy screen that kindly nature had cast over the giant boulders and ragged rocks of the hillside, the thought suddenly occurred to her that his previous visits had nothing at all to do with the purposes he had alleged.

The head looked carefully around, and then, apparently satisfied that no watchers were near, rose gradually, and the body of the man appeared. Again he looked up and down the road and over at the wing-dam shanty, and then stepped out into the little open space right in front of the leafy bower which had served him as an ambush.

He was dressed in rough miner-fashion, flannel shirt, coarse pantaloons, heavy boots, and a sort of a little pea-jacket.

In one hand he held a double-barreled shot-gun, and in the other a fine, plump partridge. The man chuckled a bit, then he cocked the gun, and resting it against his shoulder, fired it into the air; then in a second, dropping it, he whirled the partridge through the air straight for the door of the shanty.

But as the partridge left his hand—even as it came whirling along in its course, Elinore had risen from her knees, opened the door of the shanty suddenly, and the dead bird had fallen at her feet.

So sudden was the movement that the stranger was taken completely by surprise. No time was there for him to take to the friendly shelter of the bushes, as it was now evident he had previously done on like occasions.

He was caught in the act; no chance to deny the deed; red-handed he was taken.

Scarlet as the lurid flame grew the face of the miner. He cast a frightened look around him as if with design to seek the nearest avenue of escape, but the clear, shrill voice of the girl restrained him.

CHAPTER XVI. SANDY ROCKS.

"GOOD-MORNING, sir!"

The stalwart miner blushed like a girl.

"Good-mornin', marm," he replied, in a trembling voice.

"Did you find the gentleman you were in search of?"

A guilty look came over the honest face of the stranger, and he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, like a turkey standing on a hot plate.

"I reckon he's quit these diggin's," he observed, slowly.

"What a beautiful bird!" and as she spoke, Elinore stooped and picked up the partridge. Like the rabbit, the bird was stone-cold; evidently had not been alive for hours.

"Yes," said the miner, suddenly betraying an interest in the proceedings. "It's as nice a partridge as ever drummed on a log."

"Did you shoot it?"

The stranger looked decidedly embarrassed at the simple question. He hesitated, stroked his long beard for a moment, then slowly replied:

"Wa-al, I reckon I didn't kill the critter; I bought it of a 'John.'"

"A John?" the girl was puzzled.

"Yes, a John—Chinaman, you know," the miner explained. "We always call 'em John for short."

"The Chinaman shot the bird, then?"

"Wa-al, marm," I reckon he didn't; he snared it with a wire; them Johns are tarnal smart; you don't ketch them wasting powder and shot when a little bit of wire will do as well. Them heathens, marm, would git fat whar a decent Christian man would starve."

"I suppose it was to your kindness that my father and myself are indebted for the game that has been left at the door," the girl said, simply, as if it was the most natural thing in the world for a benefactor to throw his gifts against a door and then run for dear life.

The hunter blushed and hesitated again; but he was fairly cornered and felt compelled to speak.

"Wa-al, I reckon it were," he replied.

"You know my father?"

The stranger caught at the opportunity eagerly.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed; "I got acquainted with your father the first time he came down to the town."

"I suppose that this is a sort of practical joke that you are playing upon him?" Elinore said, in the most innocent manner in the world, and she held up the dead bird as she spoke.

The face of the stranger cleared instantly; here was a way out of the hobble in which he had been caught. In the usual blindness natural to man, he did not perceive that the girl deliberately had planned the scheme.

"Wa-al, marm, now you've hit it!" he exclaimed, assuming an expression which was intended to represent mirth and wonder combined. And feeling decidedly relieved, he quitted his position upon the hillside and advanced slowly to the girl.

"My father is not in at present, but if you will give me your name, I will tell him that you called."

"Ain't the old man in?" exclaimed the visitor, an expression of profound astonishment appearing upon his face. Now this was really an effort of genius, considering that he had laid in ambush upon the hillside and watched the old man depart.

"No, sir; he has gone to town."

"Wa-al, I don't s'pose it matters much," he observed, reflectively. "Mebbe it would be jest as well if you didn't say nothin' 'bout my bein' hyer. Mebbe the old man might not like to hev anybody come to his house when he had quitted the shanty. Folks East used to call me John Rocks, but out in this hyer region everybody calls me Sandy; that I s'pose is 'cos my ha'r and beard are kinder sandy-colored."

"Sandy Rocks," the girl said; she was striving to remember where she had heard the name before, for it seemed very familiar to her.

"Yes, miss, that air is my handle," and then the fellow grinned as if he had said something funny.

Suddenly to the girl's recollection there came her father's description of the poker party upon the previous night.

"You were with my father last night," she said, abruptly, you and Judge Candy and Cherokee and two strangers."

Sandy looked astonished; the girl's knowledge puzzled him.

"Wa-al, yes, I reckon that's so," he replied, rather dubiously. He was afraid that the girl might hold some little grudge against the members of the pleasant poker party that was wont to meet regularly every Saturday night in the Occidental Hotel. "The old man was lucky, you know, miss, last night," he added, thinking that circumstance might mitigate her anger, if she harbored any, against the poker-players.

"Yes, so he told me; and I wonder at it, too, for it is very seldom that he wins."

Sandy looked around him mysteriously, then he advanced a step or two nearer the girl.

"Miss, if I tell you something you won't say anything about it?" he asked.

She simply inclined her head, and Sandy understood he could trust her.

"Your father didn't win the money fair," he said mysteriously.

"He did not cheat!" exclaimed Elinore, in a low, suppressed voice.

"Oh, no!" cried Sandy, quickly; "he ain't up to that when he's playin' with such sharps as he sat down to last night. Oh, it was a good, honest game as far as that goes. You musn't think, miss, that I'm a gambler, or a blackleg, or anything of that sort, for I ain't. I only play cards once in a while, miss, jest to pass away the time, and if it's fur a little money it's only to make the game interesting. It was a nice party, miss, as could be scared up for a hundred miles. Judge Candy is one of the first men of the town, and the two gentlemen from Angel's Bar, one keeps the biggest store on the Bar, and t'other is foreman of the Queen City Mining Com-

"any. It was all squar', miss, till it came to the end. Everybody had drawn out of the game 'cept your father and Cherokee; there was quite a little pile of money up, and your old man was jest sailin' reckless like. I was sittin' next to Cherokee, and as I noticed he only drew one card, I reckoned he had a heap of a hand. Your father put his money up—all he had—and then it was Cherokee's turn to ante up, but he didn't nary time. He jest laid down his hand, said, 'I quit,' and your father raked the pile on two little pair. It was clean robbery to win sich a stake on sich a hand. Jist then the landlord came in to turn us out, and I picked up Cherokee's hand unbeknown to any one of the crowd and took a look at it, and, riss, that feller had four queens—a hand, miss, that is worth almost anything that a man kin raise to put on it."

"Then this Cherokee could have won, if he had wished to?" Elinore questioned, thoughtfully.

"Sartin, miss, and he knew it, too, well enough, for he's no fool."

"Who is this Cherokee?"

The girl put the question so abruptly that Sandy for a moment was bothered. He shook his head dubiously.

"Wa-al, miss, I reckon that I don't know much 'bout him anyway. He's a nice, sociable sort of man, and is jest about the best card-player there is in town."

"What business does he follow?"

"None that I know of, miss. I reckon that he ain't much better than he ought to be, though I never see'd anything wrong about him, 'cept that leetle game last night."

"He is a man not quite so large as yourself, long brown hair and beard, dressed very neatly?"

"Yes, store-clothes and b'iled shirt," added Sandy, surprised at the knowledge of the girl.

"He brought my father home last night."

Sandy's countenance fell. He didn't relish Cherokee's visit to the wing-dam shanty.

"Will you do me the favor to keep a watch upon this man and upon my father, too? I am afraid there is evil intended."

Sandy was in the seventh heaven of delight.

"Yes, miss, I'll jest look out for 'em!" he exclaimed.

"Good-by," the girl said, suddenly, and then retreated into the shanty, while Sandy tore madly away for Cinnabar City, delighted beyond expression.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AVENGER'S WELCOME.

THE silence of desolation reigned within the little canyon through which ran the clear Shasta river, as Big Ben Tyler, the sheriff of Cinnabar City, descended into it.

A little open space, earth and lava-rock combined, fringed by cedar, pine, and juniper.

No trace of life, human or beast; not even a singing-bird ambushed amid the green boughs, or a creeping reptile, fresh from the river, crawling over the rocks. True, that within the clear waters of the Shasta the spotted trout lurked, but the shelving rock and sloping boulder concealed him from sight.

Down into the little valley the sheriff advanced with undaunted courage, but he kept a wary eye to the right and left, for he expected to discover an ambushed foe. But, as we have said, there was no sign of life visible.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Big Ben, as he came to a halt by the bank of the stream. "I wonder if this is a sell after all? Mebbe some of the boys have arranged this little job and are jest now a-roaring at gitting me to tramp 'way out hyer. I'd jest like to ketch the man that put up the job if it is a sell!" and the big sheriff smote the air with his massive fists in a savage manner.

Big Ben was attired as usual, except that the pair of revolvers which he commonly wore buckled to his waist were missing.

Tyler caressed his bearded chin reflectively, as he looked around him.

"This hyer is a reg'lar sell, anyhow!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "I reckon that I would give ten dollars to find out the galoot that shot them arrows."

Then, from behind a gigantic boulder, a hundred feet or so up the hillside, rose a figure all clad in white from head to heel.

So sudden, and so totally unexpected was the appearance of the strangely-clad figure, that the valiant sheriff jumped as if he had suddenly put his foot upon a sleeping rattlesnake. His hand, too, he thrust underneath the short coat he wore as if with intent to draw a weapon, probably forgetting that his revolvers were not buckled to his side as usual.

A hoarse laugh came from under the white hood that hid the head and shoulder of the apparition-like form, as he beheld the sudden terror of the sheriff, erst the bully of Cinnabar.

"It ain't a sell, Mr. Sheriff!" the strangely-clad being exclaimed. "You have kept the appointment and so have I. Perhaps before we get through you will conclude that it would have been better if you had come fairly and openly and had not descended to attempt to trick the power which for the last month has held your life at its mercy."

"I don't understand what you are driving at," the sheriff replied, just a little confused.

"Oh, don't you?" sneered the white masquerader, in a tone of contempt. "Then I must explain, for you are very dull of comprehension. You don't wear your revolvers, I see."

"No; I reckon that this hyer is going to be a peaceable talk," the sheriff replied, endeavoring to infuse into his air and speech an appearance of bluff honesty.

"What an extremely honest and above-board kind of man you are, Ben Tyler!" and again the discordant laugh re-echoed among the rocks.

The countenance of the sheriff betrayed decided uneasiness, that he felt very uncomfortable was evident.

"They will have to change your name, most worthy sheriff!" the stranger sneered; "instead of Big Ben Tyler, in future you must be called Honest Ben Tyler. That is, if there is any future for you."

The sheriff could not repress a sudden tremor, as the words fell upon his ears; clearly, he was threatened. Yet he could not perceive any weapons in the possession of the stranger; but all he could

see of him was from the head to the waist; the rest of the body was concealed by the boulder.

"From life to death it is but a single step, you know," the stranger continued, "and who can tell the exact moment that the dark angel may lay his icy hand upon us? Not always the man who is stricken, though sometimes the human instrument that gives the blow can form some idea. As for instance, in your own case, when you deliberately drew your revolver upon drunken Jake Belden, and shot him down almost without warning, nothing but the simple phrase, so truly Californian, 'Thar's a vacant place down-stairs for you!' and then, with a single pull of the trigger, you sent the poor devil to his reckoning."

The cold sweat came out all over the body of the burly sheriff. It was the manner of the speaker, more than the words, that terrified him, for terrified the sheriff was, and yet for years he had dwelt in the rough mining region, risking his life as freely as though, cat-like, he was gifted with a dozen lives.

"See hyer!" he exclaimed, in expostulation, "I reckoned that this hyer meeting was going to be a peaceable one. I didn't expect that thar was going to be trouble right to oncet."

"You did not expect trouble, eh?" the stranger questioned sternly.

"No, of course not."

"And you unbelted your revolvers?"

"In course; you see I don't wear 'em," and the sheriff lifted up the skirts of his coat as he spoke, so that his unarmed thighs might confirm his words.

"Yes, I perceive that you do not wear your weapons openly. I know that you unbuckled your revolvers from your waist and hid them in your bosom."

Quick as thought, Tyler saw that his game was known, and thrust his hand within his shirt to catch a revolver, but the motion was stayed by the prompt action of the masked man. He simply raised his right hand; the small revolver which it held had been concealed in the loose folds of his flowing pantaloons, and in a twinkling Tyler found himself covered by the weapon.

What could a man with his revolver caught in the inside of his shirt, and with the "hammer" down, do against a foe with a cocked and leveled weapon?

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tyler, turning white with fear. "I 'pass. I don't want any more of this!"

"You are caught in your own trap!" cried the masked man, sternly; "you laid a snare for me and you have put your own foot in it. I know that you intended to take me if you could, either living or dead. I know that Spence Waite, with five or six men, is creeping up the valley to the north of me, so as to cut off my retreat to the hills. I reckon that the 'poker-party' will lose some men as well as ducats this time. Cinnabar City don't understand that war has been declared; that I, the Death Shot of Shasta, will make it warm for them before a month is over."

"Hold on! I'll resign!" cried Tyler, thoroughly frightened.

"Too late!"

And with the word the stranger fired.

Straight through the heart of the hapless sheriff went the leaden ball. Down upon the ground he sunk, writhing in the agonies of death.

"One!" yelled the masked man, at the top of his voice, leaping to the top of the boulder as he spoke, and waving his revolver wildly in the air. "Woe to the men of Cinnabar!"

Up from the underbrush and from amid the rocks jumped the Mayor and his party. They had heard the shot, and surmised that the fight had begun.

Down from the boulder, and into the mouth of the dark canyon at the lower end of the valley, went the masked stranger.

At the very edge of the canyon the river dashed over a rocky ledge, a fall of a yard or so, and in the bed of the stream the avenger took up his position and waited for the attack. Alone, single-handed, he intended to fight the Mayor of Cinnabar City and the sheriff's posse, now under the command of Spencer Waite.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A QUEER ROUT.

WITH loud cries of rage the Mayor and his men rushed forward. They had witnessed the fall of the burly sheriff, and burned to avenge his death.

Onward over the rocks at headlong speed they rushed.

Behind the ledge of rocks, nearly half his body fearlessly exposed to view, the masked stranger awaited the onset.

Not until the attacking force came within three hundred feet did they realize that there was a probability of a battle.

When they beheld the strangely-attired man in his ridiculous dress of white, leap from the summit of the boulder and run like a deer toward the dark mouth of the canyon, involuntarily they had followed in chase. It was the same idea that prompts a dog to chase a running man, but when they found that the murderer of the sheriff had halted behind a rock intrenchment and evidently intended to give battle, their speed slackened, and each and every member of the party cast glances about for a boulder large enough to shelter the precious body of a man.

Waite, the Mayor, was in advance, and when he discovered that his followers were lagging he too halted. At that moment the masked man rose in his fortification and took deliberate aim with his revolver.

It was the Mayor of Cinnabar that he covered with his pistol, but in just about a second not a man of the attacking party could be seen!

The Death Shot laughed, loud and scornfully, sat down upon a boulder that crowned the rocky ledge, and for five minutes at least the ripple of the water and sighing of the breeze through the tree-tops were the only sounds trembling on the air.

Then, heads could be detected peering around the corners of the rocks, and the men nearest to each other commenced to exchange conversation.

"Let's dash at him," urged Waite, to his nearest neighbor, who happened to be the Red-Dogite, Dandy Jim.

"Not much," replied that gentleman, laconically. "This cuss means business every time. I reckon that we had better cash our chips and levant!"

"Oh, no!" cried another one of the party, a huge-

bearded, fierce-looking miner, with an assumption of great courage, "let us go in and clean the critter out; I reckon that five of us ought to be able to fix one man."

"That's so, hoss," remarked the man-from-Red-Dog, placidly, "but I'm putting up my money that he flaxes us, ten dollars to five; I'm open to takers, and any gentleman that gets killed in the fight needn't pay me. Kin I say squarer?"

"Mebbe you're afraid?" suggested the brawny miner, with a sneer.

"Mebbe you are a better man than I am, but I'll bet you ten dollars I can skin ye, and I'll call upon that white cuss yonder fur to see fair play," responded the man-from-Red-Dog.

"Hold on, don't quarrel," interposed Waite; "we will have enough to do to fight this fellow hyer without fighting among ourselves."

"Korrek!" exclaimed Jim; "it's your say-so, Mister Mayor; all I want to remark is that this is the healthiest poker-party that I ever took a hand in. Big Ben said that thar would be a heap of fun, but I reckon that the poor galoot got more than he bargained for."

"We'll put this thing to vote," Waite said. "How many of you are in favor of going for this fellow right away?"

"I, for one!" exclaimed the miner; "he won't stand with five of us after him."

"I've got enough of this b'ilin'," said the smallest man in the party, doggedly. "This hyar ain't no consarn of mine, anyway. The white fellow is all fight, an' I ain't anxious to trouble my friends to 'plant' me yet awhile."

"Pardner, that's my platform," remarked the man next to the little one. It was plain that the two had talked the matter over.

"What do you say?" asked the Mayor, addressing the man-from-Red-Dog.

"I reckon that these gentlemen are playin' the 'lead' that I want to foller," Jim replied, nodding to the two who had just spoken. "But I don't want any two-legged man to doubt my pluck. I'm like a first-class dog, I know when I've got enough, and I ain't ashamed to say so."

And just at this moment the masked man took a hand in the debate.

Rising from the boulder upon which he had been sitting, he advanced boldly toward the besieging line.

The little man, who had his head sticking out from behind the boulder that sheltered him, was the first one to discover the movement upon the part of the solitary foe.

"Oh, blazes!" cried the miner, in affright; "he's coming!"

Then, from the shelter of the rock, sprung that little man, and up the valley he raced.

Fear is contagious.

Each one of the attacking party peeped out from behind the sheltering rock, beheld the man, revolvers in hand, steadily advancing upon their line, and one by one they rose and fled.

As the man-from-Red-Dog afterward remarked, he reckoned that a champion foot-racer wouldn't stand no show with the members of that crowd.

The masked man did not attempt to attack them. Perhaps he believed in the Spanish proverb, "Build a bridge of gold for a flying enemy."

Great was the excitement in Cinnabar City when the Mayor and the sheriff's posse returned.

The bar-room of the Occidental was a scene of tremendous excitement, when the man-from-Red-Dog came in and related the details of the fight.

Cherokee, who had happened to drop into the Occidental saloon just before Jim arrived, suggested that it would be a good idea to raise a party and proceed at once to the scene of action.

It did not take long to procure volunteers, and in half an hour the party was on the march. There were twenty-five or thirty altogether, a force sufficiently ample to cope even with the mysterious man in white who had assumed so terrible a title.

One bold and skillful man, reckless of life and well armed, might possibly defeat five or six men, but twenty-five or thirty, the feat was quite beyond probability.

And hardly had the force departed from the town when there came a second shock to the city of Cinnabar.

Mayor Waite came out, called together a crowd, made a little speech, and resigned the mayorship of the town. It was very evident that Waite did not consider the threat of the masked man to be an idle boast. He feared the power of Shasta's death-shot.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ARMY.

THE Clear-grit Sharp sat in the little cave that the original proprietors of the Clear-grit lode had dug out in the hillside.

A hole about ten feet deep, by six high and nine wide, had been dug into the bluff, thus forming quite a spacious little apartment. The front had been roughly boarded up, and a door arranged.

As William Yuba had remarked, with a great deal of satisfaction, when the cave had been originally completed and he had given the "boys" an invitation to a "house-warming," "for style she ain't much, but she jes' knocks socks outen 'em for comfort."

And the redoubtable Bill was right, too. Not a shanty was there in town any more comfortable than the Clear-grit "hole," as the miners at large generally termed the brilliant device of Yuba.

The new owner of the Clear-grit lode was a "keerless" man, and the cave seemed to agree with him exactly. It had not been included in the original purchase, as Yuba had valued his "chateau" at fifty dollars, a price that the stranger insisted was clearly too large by half, but when the unlucky Yuba had lost all his ducats to the cool stranger in the exhilarating game of poker, and had savagely demanded if he wasn't to "git no show, nohow," the stranger had quietly offered to lay fifty dollars against the cave, if that would be an accommodation.

William had jumped at the offer and had boldly and daringly risked the entire fifty upon "two pair," and the stranger had "warmed" him with "three of a kind," and so the peculiar mansion came into his possession.

Mr. Brown had improved the "chateau" somewhat, added new boards to the front, put a few boxes inside in lieu of furniture—that device of

civilization was not particularly in fashion in the young metropolis of the Shasta valley—deepened the fireplace in the center of the apartment where the great sticks of wood in severe weather were wont to blaze cheerfully, and had laid in quite a stock of creature comforts, not forgetting the potent fire-water, so necessary to the transaction of all business on the frontier in these our modern years of grace.

Brown was seated on a candle-box close to the fire which blazed fitfully in the oddly-arranged fireplace. A candle was burning on the dry-goods box—the table—a yard or so away.

The Clear-grit Sharp was gazing intently into the flickering flames, that wavered and coiled around each other like so many little fiery snakes.

It was evident from the expression upon his face that his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

Suddenly he roused himself from the abstraction in which he was wrapped and consulted his watch. It wanted twenty minutes of twelve.

"It's time for my man," he muttered; "he said that he would be here before twelve, sure."

And hardly had the words passed his lips when the tramp of footsteps came to his ears.

Evidently by the noise made there was quite a large number in the party.

"It's my men, I reckon," the cold, icy-mannered Mr. Brown remarked, as he arose from his seat, approached the door, and looked out upon the night.

The moon was just rising and the stars were shining very brightly, so that objects fifty feet away were plainly visible. As Brown looked out, five men in single file, Indian fashion, were approaching the Clear-grit cave.

Brown recognized the leader of the five; it was William Yuba, and he also discovered another fact that did not please him—all were decidedly under the influence of liquor, and as they marched, the line swayed and wriggled like a wounded snake; a Virginia rail-fence was nothing to it. The party of five covered ground enough for sixteen.

"The beasts!" muttered Brown, as he resumed his seat.

The tramp came nearer and nearer, and then halted outside the door.

"Tention, you galoots!" exclaimed Yuba, vociferously.

"Tention we is, me noble dook!" responded a voice, hoarse with liquor, and as the sound reached the ears of Brown, he started.

"I've heerd that voice afore, somewhar!" he muttered.

Then Bill entered the cave, announcing:

"Hyar we are, sport!"

"Five of you?"

"Ko-rect."

"Men that you kin trust?"

"I bet yer!"

"You're all drunk!"

"Wa-al, I reckon that I did set the boys up a leetle," admitted Yuba, cautiously; "but they'll be all right in the morning. They're all a-goin' to swear off to-night."

"You can answer for every man you've got?"

"Every man of 'em," answered Bill, emphatically.

"I'd be willin' to lend money to any one of 'em—if I had it. Kin I say more?"

"Run 'em in one by one, and let me look at them. They understand that we are going to risk our necks, maybe?"

"That's all right," Bill replied, confidently; "I'll back the crowd outside for anything, from goin' through a 'John' to skinnin' an' express-coach."

"Go ahead then."

Bill at once introduced No. 1.

He was a short, bandy-legged, crop-headed Englishman. After a single look at his ugly features, it was easy to guess that he had found his passage to the golden California by the way of the penal settlements of Van Dieman's Land. He answered to the name of Jack Ball.

Brown exchanged a few words with him, and being apparently satisfied with the examination, bade him be seated at the further end of the cave.

No. 2 was called in.

Dennis Shannon, a tall, thick-set Irishman, whose broken nose and otherwise disfigured face hinted of a prize-ring disciple. From great Gotham Shannon had come, and a life sentence in the State prison awaited him if he should dare to return to the Empire State.

He too was accepted by Brown as satisfactory, and told to seat himself by Ball.

Yuba beckoned in No. 3.

A yellow-skinned, dark-eyed Mexican, slight in figure, withered in face, and betraying the rogue in every feature. He was known as Antone Velarde.

Brown accepted him at once; to his judgment he was the best man of the three.

"Fetch in the other!" Brown commanded.

Yuba went to the door, and then in walked the original Joe Bowers.

With a confident smile upon his fat face, the bum-mer had stepped into the cave, but the instant his eyes fell upon Brown's face, the smile faded away slowly, and a look of bewilderment took its place. It was evident Brown's face seemed familiar to him.

And upon the part of the Clear-grit Sharp, he too betrayed that he had seen Bowers before; but, unlike the vagrant, he did not appear bewildered, only astonished.

"This is No. 4!" exclaimed Yuba, introducing Bowers. "He's fat and lazy, but he'll do to tie to. I'll answer for him."

Bowers scratched his head, thoughtfully.

"I axes your pardner, pardner, but hain't I seen you afore?" he said, addressing Brown.

"Your face seems familiar, but I reckon I can't place you," and Brown, looked Bowers full in the face as he spoke, just as if he was striving to test the memory of the bum-mer.

The look of bewilderment vanished suddenly from Bowers's face, and Brown, perceiving it, looked annoyed.

"Pardner, I hev fixed you!" Bowers cried, in triumph. "It were in Susanville, in '59!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE COMPACT OF BLOOD.

"SUSANVILLE—'59," said the Clear-grit Sharp, reflectively. "Well, I reckon that I was thar about that time."

"I know'd it!" cried Mr. Bowers, glowing with enthusiasm. "I allers tell 'em, 'Jes' put your money on the orig'nal Joe Bowers every time! He's the man kin carry the dust." I reckon that I've been in this hyer vale of tears nigh onto fifty years—I ain't no colt, I ain't—and nary a man did I ever know that I couldn't tell for an old pard of I met him twenty years arter. Why, pardner, I know'd you in a min'te. You see, that little scratch on the side of your face couldn't be forgotten; nary time."

"You remember the time I got it?"

Bowers seemed to be buried in reflection for a moment, and then he shook his head dubiously.

"No, pardner, you are too much for me. I pass; can't raise the 'blind' nary time."

"Fight with a bear," said Brown, in an explanatory manner.

"Oh, yes, of course," chimed in the bum-mer; "but a gent'l'man is apt to forget these leetle things oncet in a while. Faces is my best holt. Nary face slips my grip. I see it oncet, and it's thar forever. Why, blessed ef I kin remember your name."

"Brown," said the Clear-grit Sharp.

"That's so!" exclaimed Bowers, suddenly and decidedly. "I were jes' a-going to ax you ef Brown wasn't your handle."

"Will he do?" asked Yuba, a little afraid that his candidate would be rejected.

"You kin count on me!" exclaimed Bowers, before Brown had time to answer the question. "Jest you ax anybody that knows me! From Frisco cl'ar to Oregon thar's nary a man that you kin trust better than old Joe Bowers."

"All right," Brown said, shortly. Then he cast his eyes over the members of the "army."

"Now, boys, I want you to understand, right at the beginning, that this hyer job that we are going into is no child's-play. I suppose Yuba has explained something about the matter?"

The "army" nodded as one man.

"I jest told 'em that thar was a chance to make some dust if they wasn't particular how they coraled the plunder!" Yuba declared.

"Well, it's more than that," Brown said; "thar's a chance of being wiped out thrown in."

"I reckon that won't skeer me for one," Jack Ball, the Englishman exclaimed. "I've 'ad the vigilantes arter me as often as I've got fingers and toes. The blarsted beasts never took me yet!"

"If I had a dollar for every time I've showed the hangman a clane pair of heels, I'll go bail but that it's a rich man I'd be!" Shannon, the Irishman, cried, boastfully.

"Caramba! I make no boast!" the Mexican said; "but each ring on my fingers I bought with the life of its owner!" and as he spoke he extended his thin, tawny hands, the fingers of which were loaded with glittering hoops of gold and silver.

"Ax anybody that knows me and they'll tell you that old Joe Bowers never blows his own horn!" announced the bum-mer. "All I kin say is, if thar's a cuss to be stuck in the back, jest you let out the job to the orig'nal Joe Bowers, and then go and dig the grave and prepare for the funeral, for the 'stiff' will be ready. Kin I say more?"

No one seemed disposed to answer the question, so Yuba took it upon himself to speak.

"I reckon that I don't need to blow much about what I kin do. Good many folks have heerd of Yuba Bill, and good many of 'em wished they hadn't. That's all I've got to say."

"Now, then, it's my say-so," Brown remarked, in his cool and quiet way. "First and foremost, I want you all to distinctly understand what you are doing before you pledge yourselves in this affair. I'm going to offer the whole lot of you the biggest chance to make a strike that this hyer region ever heerd of. But, understand, after you once get in, thar's no getting out."

"I'm agreeable to that!" was Yuba's response.

"In course," added Bowers, while the other three simply nodded.

"Not only that, but in this affair we may have to risk our lives; in fact, I'm sure that we will. We shall have to shed blood, maybe a good deal of it, and in so doing run our necks right into the halter. Any man that is afraid of a long rope and a pine tree had better step out now."

But one and all shook their heads, and with an air of bravado proclaimed their lack of fear.

"Another point," said Brown, in his cool way; "in this affair it is distinctly understood that I am to be chief. Whatever orders I give must be obeyed without question. Mind, I sha'n't ask any man hyer to face any peril that I won't take a part in myself. We must all stand and perhaps hang together."

Just a little shade of seriousness passed over the faces of the little group as they listened to the words of the Clear-grit Sharp, and one or two of the party involuntarily stretched their necks a little, even as if they felt the touch of the death-strangling cord.

Brown's sharp eyes noticed the look upon the faces of the ruffians, and a sardonic smile crept over his features.

"And in consideration of all this," he continued, "I agree to distribute weekly the sum of thirty dollars per man, no matter whether we gain any booty or not."

The faces of the "army" brightened up at this announcement, and they all looked decidedly more cheerful.

"And when we do take plunder it shall be divided into eight equal parts, three shares to me and one share apiece to each of you."

"That's fair enough," Yuba observed, reflectively.

"Squar' as a dollar!" Bowers declared.

As usual, the other three nodded; they, too, were satisfied.

"And now, one last clause," Brown remarked, very deliberately. "We are all partners in this hyer affair, six on us; one traitor could hang the other five."

The members of the "army" looked at each other suspiciously.

"I reckon that the man that peaches on me had better ax for a reserved seat in blazes," Yuba exclaimed.

"I'd knife him quicker'n a wink!" Mr. Bowers observed.

"Me, too!" the Mexican cried.

The others said nothing, but merely placed their hands significantly upon their weapons.

"Suppose we sign a leetle agreement about this affair," suggested Brown, "binding ourselves to be true to our compact under penalty of death."

"Count us in!" Yuba replied, after consulting the other members of the party with a glance.

From his pocket Brown drew a folded paper; he opened it and read aloud:

"We six pledge our hearts and hands each to the other, and if we fail to keep our oath may the death of a dog and a home in everlasting flames be our portion. Witness our marks."

Then Mr. Brown coolly bared his sinewy right arm, jabbed a pen into it, and with the blood that crimsoned the point of the steel, made a bold cross upon the paper.

"No names needed, boys; our cross of blood is enough," Brown remarked, as he handed the pen to Yuba.

Then each and every one stabbed their arm and affixed a bloody cross to the oath.

To these rough, uncultured men, this simple ceremony had a strange solemnity.

All fully betrayed by their faces the deep impression that the work had made upon them, with the single exception of the vagabond, Joe Bowers. He affixed his cross with a very theatrical air, and afterward kissed the paper with a resounding smack. Evidently the bum-mer was too old a bird to be caught by such unsavory chaff.

"Now, the thing is settled," Brown remarked, as he folded the paper; "and as our first job, boys, we tackle the haunted Cinnabar mine."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN DEFIANCE OF GHOSTS.

THE members of the army looked decidedly astonished. The haunted Cinnabar mine had been the talk of the town, and if the ruffians had been allowed to choose they would rather have openly defied five of the best men in the city, than have attempted to brave the spirits of the mine.

The five looked at each other in a dubious sort of way.

"The haunted mine," Yuba observed, as if addressing himself rather than any one else.

"That's what I said," the Clear-grit Sharp remarked; "that is if you call the Cinnabar lode the haunted mine."

"But it is haunted, you know," the Englishman protested, a shade of doubt visible upon his weather-beaten face.

"So I have heerd," Mr. Brown confessed, placidly.

"Me noble dook, it is a sure enough fact!" Joe Bowers declared, with a solemn shake of the head.

"Caramba! yes," the Mexican exclaimed; "all the town knows that well enough!"

"I don't know it," the Sharp replied, in his quiet way.

"I heerd that a party were run outen thar t'other night," Yuba added.

"I was thar," Bowers said, with a great deal of dignity.

The eyes of all the party turned upon the vagabond, instantly.

"Go it!" Brown remarked, in a sharp, decisive way.

Mr. Bowers understood that he was called upon for an explanation, so he at once proceeded to relate the particulars of his visit to the abandoned tunnel of the Cinnabar mine, in company with the prospecting miners, headed by Jones.

Brown and the rest listened attentively to the tale, which Mr. Bowers did not hesitate to embellish with sundry additions, more or less wonderful.

When the veteran bum-mer finished with describing the appearance of a ghost, clad all in white, six feet high, and clanking massive chains, there was a dead silence in the cave, a silence broken by the Clear-grit Sharp, who uttered but one word, but in that word compressed a great deal.

"Gas!" said Brown, contemptuously.

Bowers felt wounded; he cast a reproachful glance at Brown, and then laid his hand, solemnly, upon his heart.

"It air true, so help me Bob!"

"Get out! You're a first-class fraud!" It was plainly to be seen that Mr. Brown was not at all impressed with the ghost-story.

Bowers drew himself up in an injured sort of way.

"I don't ax no man to say old Joe Bowers is squar' every time; he's a man that you kin tie to—he's the clear white article—he's solid stuff and no discount. As I said afore, I don't ax any man to say that, but it has been said. I am one of the men of '49; thar were giants in those days, gent'l'men, and I'm one of 'em. No man ever doubted my word afore. I h v traveled all over Californy, from the lower gulf cl'ar to the Oregon line, and everywhar thar was the same report. If you want a man that's a judge of good liquor—a man that kin hold his end up when it comes to draw-poker, a man that you kin put your money on—why, his name is Joe Bowers. Didn't you never heer that song 'bout me?"

"Oh, my name it is Joe Bowers, From England I did come—"

"Quit your howling!" exclaimed Brown, interrupting the pathetic Mr. Bowers, and evidently not at all impressed either with the bum-mer's speech or poetry.

"But I say, cap'n," Yuba insisted, "it is a fact that a party of 'em were run out of the tunnel and that they heerd the most awful groans. I talked with one of the pilgrims myself."

"Oh, I don't doubt that, at all," Brown admitted; "but I have never run across a ghost yet, and I've wandered up and down on this earth for a few years; so you see, I don't take much stock in that kind of thing."

"But these galoots reckoned that it was a ghost," Yuba maintained; he rather believed in the ghost theory.

"I have seen men skeered and run from a white cow," Brown declared; "they swore, too, that it was a ghost; but, you see, darkness changes things."

"Faix! I'm for yees anyway, ghost or no ghost!" the Irishman boldly averred.

"That's the way to talk!" responded Brown. "If it is a sure-enough ghost, I'll be as quick to run as the next man."

"Boss, I don't ax you to believe me, but I see'd the thing and heerd it," Bowers said, mournfully.

"I've heerd the wind howl, and I've seen things at

night that looked different by day," Brown observed. "But we'll find out about that soon enough. Now, boys, I'll jest lay out the game. I s'pose 'bout all of you know something 'bout this hyer mine?"

"I reckon I do, for one," answered Yuba. "I've bin hyer ever since the Injuns were whipped out of the valley."

"Well, I know the place almost from the time that the first shanty was put up hyer," Brown said. "The Cinnabar lode was worth a heap of ducats then; it's worth a heap now, ef a man can only get at the ore."

"But thar's ill luck about the mine," suggested Yuba, with a sagacious shake of the head; "I've known six or eight men to be 'wiped out' round about it."

"Exactly; every party that has tried to work the mine has been driven away; if the ghosts didn't fetch 'em, bullets did."

"No, pard, you're wrong thar," asserted Bowers; "it was an Injun arrow every time; nary noise, but sudden death."

"And did the ghosts fire the arrows?" demanded Brown, somewhat sarcastically.

"I can't foller your lead, me noble dook; I pass," responded Mr. Bowers, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well, I reckon that the ghosts and the arrows are pretty well acquainted. The fact of the matter is just hyer, boys, it's a regular 'brace' game. In that Cinnabar tunnel is some of the richest ore that ever a pick was stuck into. Somebody knows it, and is working the 'lead' too, but is doing it on the sly, and this ghost and Injun-arrow business is jest to frighten other folks away."

The members of the little group betrayed by their faces the interest they took in the explanation of the Clear-grit Sharp; all, except Joe Bowers, and he looked decidedly uneasy. Brown was watching him intently, although not apparently paying any more attention to him than to any of the rest.

"Now, boys, I 'savvy' all this, and I've made up my mind to take a hand in this little game myself. Ghosts I ain't afeard of, and as for the arrow biz, I reckon that at that Jack will be as good as his master. I'll back my revolver ag'in' the Injun bow any day in the week. But we're going to work this hyer thing cunning. We ain't going to walk out in the broad daylight, and say, 'We're going for the Cinnabar lode; nary time; that ain't our little game. We're going to play it on the sneak. We'll tackle the mine after dark; we'll play Mr. Ghost ourselves: you, Bowers, are good at howling—that's your best holt. I reckon you kin fill the bill on the ghost question.'"

Bowers did not reply; it was evident that he was in a brown study.

"And if it comes to fighting, I reckon we can do our share. Now, as thar's nothing like frying fish when the pan is hot, we'll dust out at once for the Cinnabar tunnel."

Courage is contagious, and the "army" at once signified its willingness to encounter the terrors of the mysterious mine. Even Joe Bowers muttered a feeble assent; it was very evident that the veteran was not in his usual spirits.

Picks and shovels had been provided by the careful Mr. Brown; also lanterns; it was clear that he had made all needful preparation. It did not take long for the gang to equip themselves, and within ten minutes the Clear-grit Sharp and his cohort were stealing like so many phantoms through the gloom of the night, heading straight for the haunted tunnel; that ill-fated spot which had witnessed the expenditure of so much treasure, so much blood, and all for naught. If the spirits of the dead can return to this world, surely a score of unquiet ghosts should haunt the gloomy portals that guarded the entrance to the Cinnabar lode.

CHAPTER XXII.

PATRICE.

EARLY in the evening the expedition, which had started from Cinnabar City to the battle-ground in the canyon, returned, bearing the body of the hapless sheriff. No trace was discovered of the mysterious white rider who had wrought so terrible a vengeance. High up the valley the expeditionists discovered traces where a horse had evidently been standing, and even tracked the hoof-marks of the beast for a hundred yards or more, but after that the hard surface baffled pursuit.

The death of the sheriff and the resignation of the Mayor afforded ample food for wonder.

Waite, when questioned upon the subject, said simply that he wasn't quite ready to die yet, and he was perfectly satisfied with what he had seen of the Death Shot of Shasta, and didn't care to have anything more to do with him. He related, too, the incident of the arrow shot in through the window of his sleeping apartment and the warning that had been so mysteriously conveyed into his securely-locked apartment. In fine, as the late Mayor of Cinnabar City frankly remarked, it seemed as if Old Nick himself was at the bottom of the affair.

There were plenty of men in Cinnabar City quite ready to declare Spence Waite to be no better than a poltroon to "take water" so easily, and to loudly declare that the Death Shot was nothing but a daring road-agent who was simply trying a new dodge.

Probably one of the most interested men in town was Jimmy Yorker, the landlord of the Occidental. A hundred times he had cursed the foolishness that had induced him to venture back to Cinnabar City. And, although the white rider had spared him once, he dreaded lest the masked assassin might change his mind and again attempt his life.

But time flying onward cares nothing for mortal wishes or for mortal struggles. The night lengthened, slumber came, and the morning dawned as usual.

And while the inhabitants of Cinnabar City were rising, preparing for the toil of the day, high up on the hillside, seated upon a massive boulder, the young and solitary niece of the hotel-keeper was gazing down upon the waking city.

The sun was just creeping over the hills of the east, and his first bright rays were kissing the dimpled bosom of the swift-flowing Shasta. From the valley rose the faint mists of the morning, hanging like a shadowy veil over the rough cabins of the miners, from the rude chimneys of which the smoke of the breakfast fires was pouring.

Although the young girl had only passed a few days in the mining region, yet she had grown quite accustomed to the rude life, and the wild, savage beauty of the little valley was strangely captivating to her.

And as she surveyed the scene, she suddenly became conscious that a man, with a gun held carelessly in the hollow of his arm, was climbing the hillside. She did not feel at all alarmed at the discovery, for she recognized in the man one of the boarders at her uncle's hotel.

The sportsman came within fifty feet of the girl before he seemed to be aware of her presence, and after discovering her, he hesitated for a moment as if debating the propriety of advancing; but, seeing that she did not manifest any intention of flying from his approach, he came on boldly.

"Good-morning, miss," removing the slouch hat that he wore, and bowing gallantly, as he came quite near to her.

"Good-morning, sir."

The stranger was such a contrast to the majority of the inhabitants of Cinnabar City, and so like a city gentleman in his polished manners, that the girl felt no fear.

"A pleasant view, miss," looking down upon the mining metropolis.

"Yes, and it seems so strange to me, coming straight from a great Eastern city."

"You are from New York, then, miss?"

"Yes, sir."

"I heard your uncle say as much. I believe that Mr. Yorker is your uncle, miss?"

"Yes, sir."

"I stop at his hotel," the stranger explained.

"I recognized you, sir, but I forget your name—I think my uncle mentioned it."

The girl took a very natural interest in the well-built, handsome stranger.

The man hesitated for a moment, and just a little shade passed over his face.

"I really reckon, miss, that you have made a mistake there," he said, slowly; "for if you had ever heard my name, you wouldn't be apt to forget it, for it's a queer one. It's Cherokee."

"I believe you are right, sir," the girl confessed, honestly. "I think that I was mistaken." And then, as if with intent to change the conversation, she inquired: "You are well acquainted with Cinnabar City, Mr. Cherokee?"

How strangely it sounded to the fortune-buffed man, whose heart and brain were seared by a hundred wrongs, to be thus addressed by this pure young girl.

"Yes, miss, I reckon that I am pretty well acquainted with the country hereabouts," and then to her delight he proceeded to point out the various objects of interest visible in the valley from the spot where they stood.

"You are very kind indeed," she said, when he had finished his description. "I already take a great interest in this wild country, yet I have never visited a gold mine. I passed near them on the road here, but I mean I have never examined them and witnessed the process of extracting the gold from the ore. Are you interested in a gold mine, Mr. Cherokee?"

If the long-haired son of fortune had answered with strict adherence to the literal truth, he might have stated that he was interested in every gold mine in the valley, provided the owners of the afore-said mines were fond of the fascinating game of poker; but, as it was, he simply replied that he was not working any claim at present, but was on the look-out for a good lode to invest in—a condition, by the way, normal to every inhabitant of the mining region.

"Oh, I was in hopes that you did own a real gold mine, for then I should have asked permission to visit it and see the gold extracted!" the girl exclaimed, with charming innocence and grace.

"Oh, there's no difficulty about that, miss," he averred; "your uncle can introduce you to plenty of gold-miners; there's half a dozen stopping at the Occidental."

The girl seemed to be a little disappointed; she had expected the handsome stranger to proffer his services.

"This country is not really so strange to me as it should be, considering that it is my first visit West," she said, somewhat abruptly, "for my mother, when she was a young girl, visited the mines, and she has often described to me the wild life common to such places."

"Your—mother?" Cherokee spoke with apparent difficulty, but, as his eyes were directed down the valley, the girl thought that he was speaking merely out of compliment, and without interest in the subject.

"Yes; before she was married, she came West for a short time."

"If you'll tell me her name—perhaps I might have met her—I've traveled a good deal," the man said, very slowly.

"Her name was the same as mine."

"Oh—Yorker?"

"No, that is not my name," she answered, surprised that he did not know that fact. "My mother married Mr. Yorker's younger brother, but instead of taking his name he took hers, so as to preserve the old family name."

"And that name?" The man was gazing earnestly into the girl's face now.

"Gwyne," she replied, astonished at the stranger's manner; "her name was Bernice."

"Yours Bernice, too?"

"No, I was named for a dear cousin of my mother. I am called Patrice. His name was Patrick."

"And your mother—?" and Cherokee hesitated.

"Dead, sir," was the response.

The stranger drew a long breath and his face was paler than usual. He turned to go.

"I hope I will see you again, miss," he said, as he hurried away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MINING SPECULATION.

Down the hillside toward the town the long-bearded stranger bent his steps, leaving the girl in a state of considerable astonishment at his abrupt departure.

"I knew that I couldn't be mistaken," Cherokee muttered. "I was sure that she was Bernice's child the moment I saw her. How strange that fate

should bring one of the Gwyne blood again in my way."

And as Cherokee hurried on he looked neither to the right nor left; the gun was still borne carelessly in the hollow of his arm, but as it was neither capped nor loaded, it was evident that it boded no danger to bird or beast.

Just before Cherokee came to the edge of the town, he made an abrupt bend to the left and continued on a parallel with the river. The course that he was following carried him at last into the road that wound along down the bank of the Shasta.

Straight onward he went, his long, vigorous stride carrying him quickly over the ground.

Around the bend in the road he passed, and the city of Cinnabar was hid from his sight, if he had cared to look behind him.

And Cherokee paused not in his onward course until the walls of the wing-dam shanty rose before him.

Down under the shadow of the dam old Ugly was delving away in the sand as usual. He never looked up, paying no heed to the sound of the footsteps until Cherokee halted on the bank above him.

"Good-morning," accosted Cherokee, bringing the butt of the gun to the ground, and resting his arm carelessly upon the muzzle.

Old Ugly looked up in surprise at being addressed, but recognized his visitor upon the instant.

"Good-morning, sir," the old man responded, with a great deal of dignity.

"How's things running?" asked Cherokee, carelessly.

Ugly shook his head and glanced down upon the sand in which he was digging, despondently.

"The claim ain't worth much," the old man replied. "A Chinaman might make it pay, perhaps, but it's a poor show for a decent white man."

"Why don't you try for a better 'lead'?"

Again Ugly shook his head.

"It takes money to buy land, Cherokee," the old man replied, "and gold and silver I have none."

"Why, I kinder reckoned that you were making a heap of dust," observed Cherokee, stroking his long beard in a thoughtful sort of way.

"Not much; I wish I was," Ugly said, sadly. "It's only the leavings that I'm picking up here."

"Well, you do pretty well playing poker with the boys, don't you?" Cherokee inquired, innocently.

The face of the old gambler brightened up just a little, and there was a momentary sparkle in his dull eyes.

"I ought to clean 'em," he replied, with an air of great deliberation, "but luck runs ag'in' me. I play a bold game allers. I know what a hand is worth, and I play it to the best advantage; but what can a man do ag'in' luck?"

"That's so," Cherokee replied, sympathizingly.

"And then I ain't got the capital to back me, either," Ugly continued. "I tell you what it is, Cherokee, it's the capital that wins the game in the long run. Where would your generals be in battle if it wasn't for the reserves that they hold back? You can reduce success right down to a science; first, pluck; next, plenty of reserves to fall back on. I tell you what it is, Cherokee, though I'm only a poor, broken-down old man now, yet I've seen the time when I made the throw for a hundred thousand dollars and never winced any more when the wrong card came up than I did last Monday night, when they cleaned me at poker of a miserable hundred or so. It was in the stock market, East; of course you don't know much about that."

Cherokee silently nodded. Whether he meant that he did or did not wasn't apparent.

"It was just the same; when I had 'em, I never had money enough to foller it up. My forces were all engaged, and I had no reserves to fall back on."

"Hard lines," Cherokee observed.

"Right! it was hard; but I bore it like a man!" old Ugly exclaimed, proudly. "No man can say of old Joe that he hain't got pluck. I may be unfortunate, but I never squeal. I'll ketch 'em yet, sir, and then I'll go back East and make the bounds yell that got the best of me, curse 'em!" and the frame of the old digger fairly shook as he uttered the words. "All I want is a hundred thousand dollars, and then I'll go back and make 'em squirm!"

Cherokee could not help feeling a sentiment of pity for the miserable old wretch who talked so glibly of wealth and vengeance commingled.

"What do you want down here anyway?" asked old Joe, suddenly, glaring at Cherokee with strong suspicion written on his face.

"Well, I was trying to scare up a little shooting," answered Cherokee, pleasantly, paying no attention at all to the rather offensive manner of the other; "and now that I've taken a good look at your claim, I don't mind if I make a little trade with you."

"I don't understand," said Ugly, still suspicious.

"Why, I think that you've got a rich 'lead' and I should like to buy in, that's all."

"Tain't a rich 'lead'!" old Ugly exclaimed, abruptly. "It's as much as I can do to keep from starving on it. It won't pay one, let alone two."

"Well, now, I really reckon that that is my look-out!" Cherokee declared, coolly. "If I'm fool enough to buy in, and it don't pay me, I sha'n't grumble about it."

"Don't want a partner!" exclaimed Ugly, abruptly.

"Hold your hosses till you hear my offer," Cherokee replied. "I'll give you ten dollars per week for one quarter interest in this claim for one year. The ten dollars to be paid weekly at Le' Pollock's store in groceries or dry-goods or notions. You see, Pollock owes me a little amount, and as he's rather hard up for cash I offered to settle the thing in goods. You are to work the mine and charge me one-fourth of the working expenses; count your services at a regular salary, of course, and deduct from my share of the proceeds. The dust to be banked by you with Spence Waite in the city weekly, and to be divided by us monthly. And it is understood that neither one of us is to touch the money until the end of the month."

Old Ugly leaned upon his shovel and meditated. That the offer was a most excellent one admitted of no doubt, considering that he, as sole proprietor of the claim, had never been able to make over ten or fifteen dollars per week from it. The only thing that made him suspicious was the liberality of the offer. He was well aware that Chen

okee was no fool at cards, but perhaps he was a greenhorn in mining matters. Another thing, too, about the contract he didn't like, and that was the tying up of the dust until the end of the month, and upon that point he instantly made objection. But Cherokee was as firm as a rock.

"That's the hand I'm going to play, old man," he said; "if you don't like the deal 'pass,' and keep your chips out. I can't be bothered with dividing the dust up every week. I'm making you a right good offer; I reckon I wouldn't do it again, but I ain't a man to go back of my word. If it wasn't for Pollock's infernal groceries, I reckon I wouldn't bother with any mining speculations, least of all with a sharp like you. But I think that you'll deal squar' with me and won't try to play no points on me, seeing that I'm green in this hyer business."

Old Ugly at once solemnly assured Cherokee that nothing in the world would tempt him—the afore-said Ugly—to take any unworthy advantage of a man that he respected as much as he did Cherokee; and he immediately closed the contract to sell him one-quarter share of the products of the wing-dam claim for the sum of ten dollars per week, knowing that the said quarter was never likely to amount to over four dollars per week at the outside, and having fully made up his mind to "gobble" three dollars out of the four as Cherokee's quarter share of the expense of working the wing-dam claim.

"Good enough!" cried Cherokee; "just stick your name in at the bottom of that contract," and he pitched a folded paper and a lead-pencil down to the old man.

Ugly perused the contents, then signed it. "You're getting a big bargain!" the old man said, with a sigh, as he threw the contract back to Cherokee.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

CHEROKEE retraced his steps, heading now straight for Cinnabar City. It was plainly evident that his only object in seeking the wing-dam shanty was to purchase an interest in the mining claim appertaining to Ugly Joe. Why the long-headed and subtle Cherokee should choose to throw away his hard-earned gains in such an extremely foolish manner, would have proved a complete puzzle to the wisest sharp that enjoyed the pleasure of Cherokee's acquaintance within the limits of the Cinnabar region. But there was a sharper pair of eyes watching the interview between old Joe Ugly and the long-haired Cherokee than any sport in the Shasta valley could boast of. What would have puzzled a man's wits, was easier solved by a woman's shrewder intellect.

Just above the old ruined dam the Shasta river made a sudden bend to the right, and the road, following the natural course that the great hand of nature had marked out for it, closely hugged the bank of the stream, so that when Cherokee passed around the bend in the road and glanced carelessly behind him, the wing-dam shanty was hidden from his sight, but in place thereof he beheld a sight that astonished him not a little.

Elinore Ugly, daughter of the aged and disreputable Joe, was hurrying along the road and had just turned the corner of the highway as Cherokee happened to look back.

Involuntarily Cherokee halted. It was not very often that he was taken by surprise, but in this case he had fallen a victim. To relate the exact truth, if Cherokee had discovered that he was followed without seeming to be aware that he possessed such knowledge, he would not have permitted her to come up to him if his legs had obeyed their master's will.

As the girl came running toward him, her long, yellow hair flying loosely in the breeze, like so many strands of beaten gold, her full blue eyes flashing with unusual fires, and a hectic spot of red burning in her cheeks, sure proof of strange and unnatural excitement, Cherokee, whose usually pale face was just a little flushed, too, by the way, thought that in all his weary pilgrimage through this world of toil and strife he had never seen a more beautiful girl.

It was beauty unadorned, too; for the coarse, blue dress of common stuff that she wore would have excited the ridicule of the commonest city girl. No trimmings, no jewelry, no collar, no head-dress, only the ordinary blue gown, incasing the lovely form of the beautifully-proportioned woman, the magnificent hair streaming freely from the shapely head, and the handsome face, so attractive in its delicate, pensive beauty.

"Stop! I want you!" exclaimed Elinore, imperiously, as she came in sight of Cherokee.

"Yes, miss, I thought so," the man replied. "I reckoned that you were after me when I saw you."

Cherokee had entirely recovered his composure by this time, and faced the girl in the cool and quiet manner so natural to him.

Panting from exertion, with her scarlet lips quivering, a strange light flashing in her eyes and an earnest look upon her finely-cut features, Elinore came face to face with the long-haired sharp.

"I overheard all that passed between my father and yourself!" she exclaimed, hurriedly. "Give me that contract!"

The girl made the demand with the air of a queen, and extended her little hand as though she expected instant compliance with her demand.

"Contract, miss?" Cherokee said, more, in truth, for the sake of speaking than for any object to be gained by making the remark.

"Yes, that contract that father signed," the girl replied, and still she kept her hand extended, as if in earnest that she would not be denied.

"You mean the agreement about the mine?"

"Yes!" cried Elinore, quickly, and she stamped her foot impatiently, as if angry at being thus trifled with. "I tell you I overheard all the conversation between yourself and my father. The walls of the house are thin and you both spoke loud. I did not try to listen, but was obliged to do so. Now give me that paper!"

Cherokee was puzzled; he could not understand why the girl was so urgent in her demand, nor why she should be so strangely excited.

"But, miss," he exclaimed, in expostulation, "the thing is all settled now."

"I know it is, and I wish to unsettle it!" she replied, firmly.

"But what's the matter—what's the trouble?"

"I trust that you will not force me to explain," Elinore said, evidently laboring under some strong emotion, but yet retaining her calmness.

"Why not?" questioned Cherokee, in wonder.

"Because the explanation will not be pleasant to you!" was the frank response.

An earnest look came over Cherokee's face, and he hesitated for a moment before he replied.

"Well, I can't really guess why you should want me to give up this hyer contract," he expostulated.

"Perhaps you think that I have taken advantage of the old man and that I haven't given him enough for the share? If you think that way, just say so, and I'll alter the figures to just what you say. I can't do anything fairer than that, can I?" and as he concluded the speech, he took the contract out of one of his pockets, produced the pencil from another, and prepared to turn words into deeds.

A look of disgust mingled with rage, swept over Elinore's face. It was very evident that the very liberal proposition of the Cinnabar gentleman was not agreeable to her.

Perceiving that she hesitated, Cherokee continued: "Come, what's the figure? Don't be afraid! I'm not the man to back out of a contract. Name the figure, and in she goes. Come, miss, don't be bashful! I don't want you to think for a minute that I'm trying to cheat your father in this hyer transaction."

"You may cheat him, but you can not cheat me!" Elinore exclaimed, suddenly, and as she spoke, her pale face became of a scarlet hue. "You know very well that the mine altogether is not worth what you have agreed to give for a quarter of it. You know that if my father charges you for working it at the regular rate that miners are paid in this country, not only will your share be eaten up, but you will have to pay out money. I will not suffer it! I can not and will not accept alms from you!"

Cherokee listened quietly to the passionate outburst, and when the girl had finished and was quivering in every limb from the storm of emotion that was raging within her slight form, he coolly and deliberately returned the contract to his pocket without saying a word.

The eyes of the girl fairly blazed as she saw the action, and her little hands were clenched convulsively together.

"You will not give it up?" she cried, excitedly. "What are you trying to do? Why is it that you wish to make my father your debtor in every possible way?"

It was now Cherokee's turn to be astonished, and his face plainly revealed that he was puzzled.

"I don't understand that accusation, miss," he said, slowly. "This hyer contract is a regular matter of business between your father and myself, and if I choose to hold on to it, even though I lose by it, that's my look-out; but as to bringing your father in my debt—"

"You let him win a large sum from you at cards the other night!" she exclaimed; "you permitted him to take the money, and it was as much yours as if it was in your pocket!"

There was just a slight expression upon Cherokee's iron-like features that told that he was not pleased.

"I reckon that some one has been saying more than he ought to," he observed, slowly; "but I can't hardly blame the fellow, considering the way he feels."

The covert insinuation told; Elinore's face became crimson, and she turned half away as if to conceal her agitation.

"A bargain is a bargain, and this one is made," Cherokee continued, firmly. "If your father gets the best of me in the mine, I reckon I can square the account at cards, and you'll be ten dollars' worth of groceries to the fore, anyhow. Good-day, miss," and with a courtly bow, Cherokee strode away.

CHAPTER XXV.

CATCHING A TANTAR.

AT just five o'clock in the morning, the veteran stage-driver, Tommy Mack, pulled the ribbons over the backs of the pair of grays and "tooled" the express hack out of the town of Cinnabar.

It was a pleasant morning; the first rays of the rising sun were peeping over the eastern hills, and all nature smiled like an infant waking from a dream of peace.

There was only one passenger going up with the express that morning, and he sat on the box with the driver.

The passenger was a stoutly-built, florid-faced man, with yellow hair and a full beard. All Cinnabar City knew Judge Bob Candy, a whole-souled white man every inch of him, and the express-agent for the town.

No better judge of a "poker" hand in the Cinnabar region than the jovial Candy; no jollier boon companion from Oregon to the Golden City, popularly termed Frisco.

The judge was indulging in the luxury of a cigar, and the driver, too, was puffing away vigorously, so that as the hack rolled on, it left a little train of smoke behind it, after the fashion of a miniature locomotive.

Few words were exchanged between the two men until they had passed out of the limits of the city, and the horses were trotting briskly along by the clear waters of the Shasta.

"Mack, what do you think of that white rider?" asked the judge, suddenly, and without any previous warning.

The driver took a long pull at the cigar and then watched the smoke curl upward for a moment before he replied.

"Wa-al, he's jest old Satan, now, I tell yer," replied Mack, ambiguously.

"He went for Jimmy Yorker, I heard," continued the judge.

"You bet!" replied Mack, in his most emphatic manner. "Ef it hadn't 'a' bin for the leetle gal, he would ha' plugged him for sure."

"Didn't offer to go through him?"

"Nary time; it was satisfaction that the critter was arter, an' he would 'a' had it, too, as I said afore, ef it hadn't 'a' bin for that pooty leetle niece of Yorker's. She jumped clare out of the hearse hyer, an' howled like a wildcat, an' then the white cuss 'lit' out as ef he had business somewhar' else mighty pressin'."

"I understand that Yorker says that he don't un-

derstand the meaning of the attack, and that he hasn't the slightest idea who the fellow is," Candy remarked, thoughtfully.

The driver fixed his eyes upon his companion and winked in an extremely knowing manner.

"You don't believe it, eh?" Candy said.

"Not much, judge!" Mack replied. "Why, the old cuss wilted to oncet. I reckon he knows what he's wanted for. The white fellow called him by another name an' sed something 'bout settling an old account; sed he was the spirt of somebody, too. I reckoned at the time that Yorker had 'fixed' one of the friends of the party in white some time back, an' now t'other fellow was goin' to squar' the thing."

"He called himself the Death Shot of Shasta, didn't he?"

"Ko-rect!" the driver answered. "I've heerd of him afore under that name, too."

"Indeed—where?" demanded the judge, his curiosity excited.

"It was 'bout the time when the Injuns were raisin' Cain in the valley hyer. One of the leaders of the reds was called the Death Shot. The sodgers swore that he never p'inted his gun at a man that the cuss didn't drop. It was sudden death when he was around."

"He was an Injun, then?"

"Wa-al—judge, you're too much for me," Mack had to admit. "Thar was nary chile in this hyer valley that seemed to know who or what he was. He wore the Injun toggery, war-paint and all, but half the soldier boys allowed that he was a white man, an' t'other half declared that he was a full-blooded buck."

"What ever became of him?"

"You're too much for me ag'in, judge," said Mack, puffing out a huge cloud of smoke. "When the bucks surrendered, there was no chief in the crowd that answered to the description of the Death Shot, an' the hull on the red devils pretended that they never heerd of any sich man. Some folks thought that he had been wiped out in the muss, but more reckoned that he had managed to slip through the military lines an' had dusted over the border to Oregon."

"I wonder if this fellow is the same Death Shot?"

"I reckon he is," Mack replied, confidently. "I was always sartin sure that the cuss was as white as I am. He know'd too durned much for a red buck."

By this time the hack had reached the wing-dam shanty, and as it rolled by the house, the driver and Candy exchanged a few words regarding the handsome daughter of old Ugly. Then the hack passed around the bend beyond the house, and entered upon what was commonly termed the first defile.

"We haven't been troubled much with road-agents in this section," the judge remarked, when the coach had fairly entered the gloomy passage.

"Thar were one or two tided it a few years ago," the driver said, "but the people swung 'em up to a pine so quick that it made their heads swim. 'Tain't any use to talk to such critters when thar's a rope an' a fair-sized tree handy."

Out of the defile the coach rolled and commenced to climb the little rise beyond. At the top of the rise the road lay level for a hundred yards or more. And as the coach came to the top level the two men upon the box beheld the white rider posted in the center of the road at the end of the level.

"He's come!" observed Mack, as he pulled up his steeds.

Quick as thought, Judge Candy drew a heavy revolver and leveled it at the masked rider, who, as yet, had displayed no weapons, but his right hand was held carelessly down by his side, and probably grasped a revolver.

"Surrender!" cried the judge, feeling sure that he had got the "drop" on the road-agent, to use the current expression.

"Oh, you can't hit a house!" the masked man replied, and in so contemptuous a manner that it made Candy wild with rage, while the veteran driver was compelled to snicker, at the same time preparing to jump from the box. He foresaw that there was going to be a "difficulty."

"Throw up your hands and surrender or I'll put a ball through you!" Candy cried, taking deliberate aim at the motionless figure of the white rider.

"I'll lay you ten dollars to one that you can't hit me in six shots," the road-agent responded.

"Hold on!" cried Mack; "lemme git out of the way!" and then the driver jumped off the coach with surprising alacrity and took refuge behind a tree.

"Throw up your hands or I'll plug you!" yelled the judge. He felt so sure of his man that it seemed to him almost like murder to fire.

"Oh, blaze away and save your breath!" the road-agent replied.

And blaze away Judge Candy did, and after he fired, the white rider laughed, and pretended to take the ball out of his breast and throw it down.

Six shots the astonished judge fired without apparently damaging the masked rider in the least, and then, as the smoke of the last shot curled upward, with a sudden movement the Death Shot raised his hand which was armed with a revolver and sent a ball through the low-crowned hat of the judge, and so near to the head did the leaden messenger pass, that Candy thought he was killed, sure, and came tumbling off the box to the ground. Before he could recover from his fright, the road-agent had dismounted from his horse and snapped a pair of handcuffs on Candy's wrists.

Mack never attempted to interfere. He was not armed, and besides it was no quarrel of his. He was a philosopher—that driver was.

The road-agent went to the coach and from the cushions removed the gold-dust concealed within them. This was the treasure that Candy was escorting. The masked rider seemed fully posted as to the treasure and its whereabouts. The dust in his possession, the Death Shot mounted his horse and rode rapidly away, leaving Candy still handcuffed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTURING A GHOST.

DARK and gloomy indeed were the deserted tunnel and its surroundings, as the Clear-grit Sharp and his little band of adventurers approached it.

In the silence of the night, men of mere animal

courage generally are cowards. There was hardly one in the party, with the exception of the cool and clear-headed Mr. Brown, and the ragged bumner, Joe Bowers, who would not have given a trifle to be well out of the scrape. But, as their leader marched boldly on, perforce they were obliged to follow.

Just at the entrance of the tunnel, Brown halted for the purpose of addressing a few words to keep up the flagging spirits of the "army."

"Now see hyer, boys, don't git skeered afore you are hurt. This ghost business is all a humbug. Some sharps have bin a-playing it on the hull town, but it can't be played on us. The mine is deserted and open to anybody to locate. It is a sure enough fortune for the hull on us, if you'll stick to me. Don't be afeared if you hear strange noises. Thar's many a hole in the rock that the wind can whistle through and we not see it. I'll go first, so if thar is any ghosts they kin take a bite out of me to begin on; and I reckon that they'll find me such tough chewing that they won't care to trouble the rest of you."

"I ain't afeared fur one!" Jack Ball said, assuming a dogged courage that really he did not feel.

"Bedad! they'll not be after seein' the fore front of my back till they bate me black and blue!" the Irishman exclaimed, flourishing a stick in his hand which he had picked up on the march.

"*Voto a brios!* I'm with you, captain!" and the Mexican stepped briskly forward, a long knife glittering in his hand, as he spoke.

"I won't run till the rest do," Yuba declared, not willing to be behind the others in brave assumption.

Bowers alone was silent, and that was something strange for the usually talkative bumner who generally managed to say two words to anybody else's one.

Brown noticed his silence and advanced directly to him.

"Well, sport, are you going to show the white feather?" he questioned, threateningly.

"I ain't afeared of mortal man," remarked Mr. Bowers, reluctantly, "but this hyer buckin' ag'in' the other world is too much for me. Pardner, ef you love your old pal, let me spread my wings and fly."

The only answer that the Clear-grit Sharp made to this pathetic appeal was to take the bumner by the back of the neck and propel him rapidly to the entrance of the tunnel.

"Hol' on! let up, rocks!" the vagabond exclaimed, in remonstrance.

"Close up, boys!" commanded Brown, sternly.

"Follow me; when you get inside the tunnel, light up; and take care to conceal the light so that no one passing by will be apt to see it. Now, git!"

This latter observation was addressed to Bowers and was enforced by the cold muzzle of a revolver.

When the bumner felt the touch of the hollow tube upon the side of his head, he marched into the dark entrance as quietly as a lamb.

When they were fairly inside, a light was struck and the army proceeded to examine their capture.

"Come on, boys," ordered Brown, still retaining his gripe upon Bowers's collar, but removing the threatening revolver from such a disagreeable proximity to his head.

"Brown, old pard, don't do it!" the bumner expostulated, solemnly; "this hyer is temptin' of Providence. If we ain't keeful, the ghosts will make mince-meat out of us for daring to walk in hyer in this saucy manner."

"Quit your howling, or I'll make mince-meat out of you!" growled the Clear-grit Sharp. "Come on."

Clear to the end of the tunnel the party went, Bowers sighing heavily all the way, but not daring to make any further remonstrance.

Brown took one of the candles and proceeded to examine the wall of rock into which a "heading" had been driven.

"I reckoned so!" he muttered as he peered at the wall. Bowers overheard the muttered words, and he half-doubled up his fist as if with intent to give the clear-headed Mr. Brown a poke in the back, but apparently changed his mind as he noticed how closely he was surrounded by the rest of the gang; and they, busy watching the actions of their leader, did not perceive the threatening action of the bumner.

"Does anybody know how long it is since the lead hyer was worked?" Brown inquired, still busily engaged in examining the wall of rock.

"Bout three months, I reckon," Yuba replied.

"Well, boys, if I ain't blind, and I guess I ain't, some galoot has had a pick in this hyer wall inside of six hours."

The members of the band stared at each other, and Joseph Bowers, Esquire, looked disgusted.

"Oh! pard, it must 'a bin the ghosts!" the bumner asseverated.

"Nary ghost!" retorted Brown, tersely. "It's a mighty rich lead, too, if I'm any judge of ore. I reckon, boys, that this hyer is a ten-strike, and no mistake."

"Oh, rocks!" the bumner yelled out at the top of his lungs, suddenly, and then he grabbed Yuba William with such abrupt violence that it upset that worthy, and he and the candle he was holding went down upon the damp floor of the tunnel, all in a heap.

The lights were extinguished, and with the Egyptian darkness that surrounded the band of adventurers came a series of terrible groans that fairly made the hair of the ruffians stand on end. But the Clear-grit Sharp was not at all terrified.

"Who's making that noise?" he yelled, fiercely; "and who put those candles out?"

"Bowers upset me!" muttered Yuba, from the distance. Upon his hands and knees he was softly creeping to the entrance of the tunnel.

Brown detected this fact at once.

"Come back hyer!" he cried; "where are you going?"

"To git lights," replied Yuba.

"Stay where you are. I've got matches in my pocket!" Brown commanded, sternly. "I'm not going to stand any of this fooling. Thar ain't nary ghost hyer."

And then, as if in answer to the words, there came another series of awful groans.

The adventurers listened and shivered.

"Oh! ef I could only think of a bushel or two of prayers," Joe Bowers whined, apparently under the influence of a mortal terror.

Again the fearful moans resounded, and a hollow voice spoke:

"Begone, rash men—fly—beware!"

The mysterious sounds echoed through the tunnel. Another moment, and the adventurers would have sought safety in flight, but that the wily Mr. Brown had come provided for all emergencies, and just at this moment he flashed the light of a bull's-eye lantern full upon the face of the veteran bumner.

Never was there a more striking tableau. Bowers had his mouth wide open and was giving utterance to a most fearful series of groans.

Caught thus in the act, he remained with open mouth and distended eyes.

It was very plain now who the ghost of the Cinnabar tunnel was, and with one accord, without waiting to consult each other upon the subject, the "army" fell upon Bowers and gave him a most awful thrashing.

Bowers, upon the ground, being soundly pummelled, now yelled in downright earnest.

"Oh, let up! hol' on!" he cried, as the Irishman's stick resounded upon his fat shoulders, and the rest of the band cuffed and kicked him. "It was all in fun. Blazes! can't you 'preciate a joke?"

A few more kicks and cuffs were administered to the bumner, as proof that his wit was appreciated, and then the bruised and battered Mr. Bowers made a full confession. He had been working the mine in secret and had played ghost to frighten other people away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEATH LOTTERY.

AFTER the sudden discovery so adroitly brought about by the Clear-grit Sharp with the aid of the bull's-eye lantern, the spirits of the "army" experienced a decided change, with the single exception of Joe Bowers, who was sore and lame from the rude buffets that had been bestowed upon him by his enraged compatriots.

"It war a neat little game of your'n, Mister Joe Bowers, to frighten everybody out of this hyer mine by playing ghost," the Sharp said, sarcastically; "but you have diskivered by this time that thar is folks in this hyer world that can't be 'played' with so thin a show. I reckoned the very first time I heered about the ghost business that thar was some gum-game about it. And was you the feller that fired the Injun arrows, too?"

The candles had been relighted by this time, so that the tunnel was again dimly illuminated.

"No, old pardner, I war not the man; as the old galoot in the play says, thou canst not say that I run the machine!" replied Mr. Bowers, theatrically.

His ardent spirits were not to be crushed even by such severe whacks as he had received from the hands of his companions.

"Oh, come, it's played, now!" exclaimed Brown, evidently doubting the statement made by Bowers.

"We're down to the bed-rock for sure. You can't play any more nonsense on me. I give you fair warning, if I ketch you up to any more games, I'll plug a hole through you quicker than you kin say Jack Robinson."

"Old pal, I have no desire to say Jack Robinson," Mr. Bowers intimated, throwing a great deal of dignity in his manner.

"None of yer durned mule-tricks now!" Brown spoke savagely. "I tell yer I'm jest old business, and I won't give you much show if I get after you once. Did you shoot those arrows?—quick!" and the fingers of the Clear-grit Sharp played nervously with the handle of his revolver as he put the question.

"Mr. Brown, old pard, as a gentl'man an' a scholar, I jest swar to you that I don't know nothin' 'bout them arrers. Kin I say more?" the bumner demanded, pathetically.

Brown's iron-like face showed evident signs of indecision. It was plain that he was in doubt whether the vagabond spoke truth or falsehood.

"Why, old pardner, ax anybody that knows me!" plead Bowers, perceiving that the Clear-grit Sharp doubted. "Ax 'em ef any livin' two-legged man ever saw the original Joe Bowers a-foolin' round with Injun bows and arrers! With one voice, like a airth-quake rippin' things, they'll yell, 'Nary time!'"

"But you have been fooling round this tunnel, playin' ghost and frightening people away," pressed Brown, doubtfully, his manner plainly showing that he thought Joe Bowers to be the author of all the mischief.

Bowers grinned for a moment; back to his mind had come the memory of the ridiculous and hasty exits he had seen prospecting miners make from the Cinnabar tunnel, blind with terror produced by Mr. Bowers's ventriloquism.

"Pardners, I 'pass' on that hand. I gi'n in," he said, gracefully. "I used to do a leetle in the show-line; been with a magician and run a side-show with a circus, and I reckon I kin sling my voice pooty well, considering how long it is since I've been in the business. I own up to playing ghost, but the Injun arrers is out of my line. I don't chip in thar worth a cent."

Brown, at last, was convinced that the bumner really was innocent of that act, and said as much.

"Now you does me justice, and my buzzum swells with pride," declared Mr. Bowers, with dignity. "I knew this hyer tunnel in the old time, when bully Dick Talbot and Billy Brown run the machine—come to think on it!" exclaimed the bumner, suddenly turning to the Clear-grit Sharp, "mebbe that same Bill Brown was a relation of your'n? He was hung by the vigilantes just outside the town."

"No," replied Brown, coldly turning away and proceeding to examine the wall near him.

"Poor Billy Brown!" muttered the bumner, reflectively; "he was as good a man as ever stretched a rope!"

The rest of the "army" had never heard of the superintendent and foreman of the original Cinnabar mining Company, and therefore took no interest in the subject. As for the Clear-grit Sharp, he seemed too much occupied with the wall to pay any attention to the bumner's words.

"I tell yer," continued Bowers, "there were men round about this hyer town in them days. Thar was Brown and Talbot and Jimmy Hughes—he kept the Dry-up—and my old side-pardner, Andy Jackson Hardin—Kentuck, the sports used to call him—who run the Last Chance. Them war times."

"Oh, shut up!" cried Brown, turning abruptly;

"We don't care anything about the past. We have got enough to do to attend to the present. You own up about the ghost biz?"

"You savvy the thing," Bowers replied.

"Oh, durn your foreign lingo!" retorted Brown, roughly. "I s'pose you mean that I know it?"

"You bet!" replied the bumner, quite promptly.

"But the arrows?"

"No savvy," and Bowers grinned.

"Thar's another party, then, trying to keep folks away from the mine?"

"I reckon so, for thar's been a heap of arrers distributed loose around hyer every time that any party has tried to work the concern," Bowers said. "I jest used to run in at night, and pick up a few ounces of dust; not much, you know, 'cos I couldn't work the ore without the proper fixings."

"We must keep shady, then, until we find out 'bout the arrows," Brown remarked, thoughtfully.

"And now, boys, as we've settled this hyer job, thar's another one on hand."

The "army" all crowded closer around to listen.

"I've got a hundred dollars hyer in this little bag, and it will go to the man who is the quickest with knife or trigger," and as he spoke, Brown drew a canvas bag from his pocket and held it up.

All understood that this mysterious giving out meant the death of a man.

With one voice each member of the band claimed the task.

"All want it, eh?" and a dark smile disfigured the sharp's face.

"Yes, yes!" cried the men.

"Well, you can't all have it, and if it is divided up it won't amount to anything."

"Settle it by chance, suggested Mr. Bowers; "let's play poker for it."

"No, no!" protested the rest, quickly; nearly all of them had tested the bumner's skill in the "frolicsome poker," and they protested that he wanted a dead sure thing of it.

"Durned if I'll play with a galoot that allers has aces up his sleeve, kings in one boot and queens and jacks in t'other!" declared Yuba.

It was evident that he referred to Bowers, but that gentleman only smiled.

"We will settle it by drawing lots," said Brown. "That will be fair for all. I will throw my share in. You five can try it—"

"And may the best man win!" adjured Mr. Bowers.

"I'll fix five pieces of wood; you draw from my hand, and the shortest piece wins the trick."

The army nodded their assent.

"S'pose the man that wins the trick slips up on it?" inquired the bumner.

"Then draw again and again, as long as any one of you is willing to go for the hundred dollars," Brown replied.

The Clear-grit Sharp at once proceeded to the mouth of the tunnel and procured five little sticks. Concealing them in his hand, he returned to the band, and the trial commenced immediately.

It only took a second to decide it, and then Jack Ball, the Englishman, held up the shortest stick.

"You're elected, pard!" ejaculated Joe Bowers.

"And the man is the fellow they call Cherokee," the Clear-grit Sharp exclaimed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LO, THE POOR INDIAN!

To say that the bold and audacious robbery of the express-hack by the white rider, who called himself the Death Shot of Shasta, created a deal of excitement, would be but to state the matter mildly.

Cinnabar City heard the tale and wondered.

Bob Candy, the express-agent, felt bad. A hundred times, at least, he had been obliged to relate the particulars of his encounter with and capture by the strange being who assumed to control the highway; the only thing that tended to console the judge in the least was, that every man who bothered him to repeat the story immediately insisted upon Bob's joining him in a social glass, and although the judge had the reputation of being able to carry as much fire-water as any man in the valley, yet by noon he was obliged to give in beat, and had to be carried off to his bedroom in the arms of four sympathizing friends.

It was kind of rough on Bob, who was one of the best-hearted men alive—we do not refer to the inability to stand up and click glasses with a hundred or more of his fellow-citizens, but to the outrage that had been committed upon him by the masked rider. As the reader will remember, the Death Shot handcuffed the express-agent and rode away without removing the delicate trinkets, so that the judge had been obliged to return to Cinnabar City manacled like a felon; and even that was not the worst of it, either, for no key could be found within the limits of the town that would unlock the ugly bracelets, and the result was that a blacksmith had to be called upon to file the ornaments off.

Of course, with all the talk and excitement, there was immediate action. A party had mounted and ridden away at once for the scene of the outrage. Nearly all of the riders were personal friends of the judge's. There was Le' Pollock, who ran one of the biggest stores in the town; Clint MacAlpine, the postmaster (Clint ran the next biggest store to Pollock), and there was a party of the Occidental fellows, as they were commonly called around town, headed by Sandy Rocks; then, too, Billy King, the barkeeper, one of the best pistol-shots in the State, and the long-haired Cherokee, were along. In fact, the party of twenty was composed of about all the young men of the town.

Tommy Mack, mounted on a huge gray mule, piloted the cavalcade. Not that the veteran driver believed there was the least use in the journey, because, as he openly said, it wasn't likely that the "white galoot" would sit down on a rock and wait for visitors, but he thought that it would help the boys' minds in regard to the matter, if they had a chance to prance around a little and tell what they would do to the terrible Death Shot if they caught him; a strong emphasis Mack laid on the "if."

So Tommy rode in the advance, not joining much in the conversation, but laughing in his sleeve at the wild talk of some of the young bloods, and mentally calculating how long it would take them to get rid of their fighting ardor if the white rider should suddenly appear and offer battle.

"I reckon a hoss-race would be nowhar to the way

some of these roosters would put for the city, ef the white galoot should gi'n one, two from his pop-gun," the driver observed, in confidence to Cherokee, who rode by Mack's side, mounted on a strange-looking spotted horse.

Cherokee silently nodded his head, as if he fully agreed with Mack's ideas on the subject.

As the cavalcade rode past the wing-dam shanty, old Ugly looked up in astonishment, and naturally inquired what was up, and when informed in regard to the quest of the horsemen, wished them luck, but "reckoned" that finding the road-agent would be about as easy a task as hunting for gold in the wing-dam claim.

The party came at last in sight of the spot where the white rider had halted the coach, and as they galloped up the rise, weapons in hand and hammers raised—much to Mack's annoyance, who swore loudly that he stood more chance of being shot than any one else—they discovered a dark form sitting motionless on a rock by the side of the road, just below the place where the coach had been halted.

"There he is!" cried one of the eager youth of the party, prepared to open fire on the stranger at once. "Hol' on!" yelled Mack; "what're you 'bout? Don't you see that it's a red-skin?"

And so in truth it was a noble red-man, sitting all wrapped up in his blanket, head and all covered, although the sun was very powerful above.

"I say, boys," cried Clint MacAlpine, "I've got it down fine. Let's hire the Injun to trail this road-agent!"

A perfect storm of approval broke from the horsemen. The idea was a taking one.

"You jes' let Clint alone for fotchin' 'em," Mack observed in confidence to Cherokee. "Tain't for nothin' that the leetle cuss got to be postmaster. He'll be runnin' fur Congress, furst thing you know, an' gittin' a thousand dollars a lick for his vote on railroad bills."

Cherokee smiled, although from the expression on his face, one would have guessed that he had not much faith in the scheme of the bustling postmaster.

The savage had remained motionless as a statue, never stirring an inch from his position and manifesting no more interest in the party of horsemen than if they had been a cloud of dust sailing along the road.

"Pull up, gentlemen, and halt this side of that big pine," MacAlpine cried; "that is, if you're willing to let me have the running of the machine for a while."

The majority of the party at once assented, and those that differed wisely held their peace.

"I'll take command, then," Clint announced; "so pull up, boys!" The party reached the big pine as he spoke. "Mack, will you dismount and come along with me, so that we can explain to the Injun what we want?"

"Sartin, I'm for you," the driver assented, and then he turned to Cherokee and requested him to hold his mule. The individual addressed was so occupied in staring at the Indian, now only fifty feet distant, that he did not hear the request of the driver until Mack repeated it.

"Certainly," he replied, "with pleasure." "Strange-lookin' cuss, ain't he?" suggested the driver, as he dismounted, referring to the Indian; "looks as if that blanket of his'n ain't seen water since the year one."

Mack joined the postmaster, and the two advanced on foot toward the savage. He was evidently aware of the whites' approach with intent to converse with him, yet he never moved.

As the whites came nearer the "noble red-man," they saw that his wardrobe was in an extremely dilapidated state. The blanket was tattered and torn; the leggins showed evident marks of brier and bramble, and the moccasins had been so frayed by the sharp stones that they hardly protected the feet of the wearer.

"I guess we kin make a trade with him," Mack observed to the postmaster, as he noticed the forlorn condition of the savage.

When the whites halted in front of him the Indian uncovered his head and looked at them. He was a middle-aged brave, and his stern and haughty features, massive as though carved out of bronze, seemed to denote a chief of rank.

The driver was pretty well acquainted with nearly all the Indian tribes of the north, and yet, after a careful glance, had decided that he had never met the tribe to which the strange chief belonged. His moccasins, leggins, all, were strange to Mack and worn by no Indian tribe that he knew of.

"Chief, speak English!" inquired the postmaster, in his brisk, bustling way.

"Ugh!" grunted the savage; "big chief—understand English heap."

"Then we can talk together," exclaimed Clint, delighted.

"Um! chief talk—he great warrior—bully boy with a glass eye!" said the Indian, proudly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CASH DOWN.

"A BULLY boy with a glass eye!" Evidently the great chief understood the white man's tongue thoroughly.

The postmaster "rose" to the occasion. He drew a pint flask from his pocket and held it up so that the chief could feast his eyes upon it.

"Um! fire-water!" grunted the brave, while his eyes sparkled. "Injun heap Christian—fire-water bad for chief—chief love his enemies—go for it!" and he extended his hand to receive the bottle.

Incautiously Clint allowed the warrior to take the flask, and the result was, that, at a single swallow, the red-man emptied the bottle.

The veteran stage-driver prided himself upon his drinking capabilities, but as he beheld the noble child of the wilderness stow away the potent fluid, he was forced to confess that the Indian could double discount him in the drinking line.

The savage removed the flask from his mouth, smacked his lips, and fixed his eyes inquiringly upon the postmaster.

"Heap good!" he ejaculated; "make Injun's stumajack warm—got more?"

Clint shook his head and examined the empty flask in astonishment. The Indian's power of suction amazed him.

"Played out?" inquired the savage in a sorrowful tone.

The postmaster replied that it was "played," whereupon the great chief looked mournful, folded his blanket tighter around him, and seemed inclined to go to sleep.

"Blazes! if this fellow comes to the city he'll make fire-water dearer 'n thunder!" growled Mack to the postmaster.

"My brother is a stranger in the valley," Clint said, surveying the worn and tattered dress of the Indian.

"All down but nine!" replied the warrior, with stately dignity, evidently under the impression that that trite expression was strong confirmation of the other's remark.

"My brother come long way?"

"Um," grunted the savage.

"What tribe, Shasta?—McCloud?"

The warrior shook his head.

The postmaster was as puzzled as the stage driver had been in regard to the nation of the strange-looking Indian. Never in all the region known as the Pacific Slope had he ever met with any Indians bearing a resemblance to the "English-speaking" warrior who seemed so familiar with the slang terms common to the mining region. The Californian Indians, too, were lighter in hue and lacked the brawny form of this strange chief.

"Sacramento?—Tonaton?" inquired Clint.

Silently the savage shook his head.

"Maybe Modoc?"

"Blackfoot," announced the chief, quietly.

The postmaster and the driver were equally astonished. They could not understand what an Indian of the Blackfoot nation could be doing so far from his home and tribe.

"Blackfoot!" exclaimed Clint, unable to repress his wonder.

"The chief has said," answered the Indian, with stolid dignity.

"Why, chief, you're a long way from your home and people!" the postmaster said.

"Injun on hunt for friend—lose him long time ago—'haps find him soon," the savage explained.

"Oh, yes, I see," Clint observed, and then he came at once to business. "See here; my brother is a big warrior, eh, heap fight?"

"Um," the savage grunted, and then he looked at the postmaster as if with intent to find out what he meant by the question.

"Can follow on the trail, eh? track his foes on the prairie and in the woods?"

"Um," again grunted the chief.

"S'pose I show chief tracks of a horse in the road lyer, could he track 'em?"

A look of scorn passed over the face of the Indian as he looked down upon the surface of the sodden road.

"In mud like here, chief track jackass rabbit, you bet!" the brave replied.

"You're the very man we want, then!" the postmaster exclaimed. "The fact is, chief, we ar' arter a fellow—we're going for him, you understand?"

"One?" questioned the Indian, casting a glance upon the numerous party halted fifty feet off.

"Yes, only one man."

"One! big warrior—whole tribe after him?"

The postmaster winced a little under the implied sarcasm.

"More run than fight, you know," explained Clint; "good many to surround him; take him and carry him back to town—our wigwams, you know!"

The Indian nodded; it was evident that he comprehended.

"We want you to track him; this chief will show you his marks," and Clint pointed to the driver.

"Big chief?" inquired the Indian, surveying Mack.

"Oh, yes!" the veteran boasted, "a regular double-barreled chief; big poker chief!"

The dull eyes of the Indian sparkled at once.

"Poker?" he grunted; "chief play poker, heap! Kin flax white brother, you bet!"

The whites were considerably astonished at this declaration and began to realize that they had got hold of a very peculiar Indian indeed.

"Will you hop in, chief?" the postmaster asked, anxiously.

"How much?" demanded the brave.

The postmaster was considerably taken aback by this matter-of-fact question.

"Oh, we'll do the fair thing," he answered.

"Twenty dollar?" persisted the brave.

"Say! we ain't traveling gold-mines!" cried the stage-driver, in astonishment.

"Injun do bully—twenty dollar," said the savage, impressively.

"Oh, that's too much!" Clint protested.

"How much gimme, s'pose Injun go?" inquired the brave, evidently desirous of making a bargain.

"Say ten dollars."

The Indian shook his head and grunted; it was plain that he did not consider the amount sufficient.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't raise the blind," mourned Clint, half-turning, as if intending to depart.

"Four times too much!" the stage-driver added, following the example set by the postmaster.

"Injun poor!" said the chief; "s'pose white brother can't 'ante' twenty dollar—chief go ten."

"All right; that's a bargain!" decided the postmaster. "Come along, we'll show you the trail."

"See Injun first," placidly remarked the noble red-man, extending his hand.

The terseness and strength of the simple sentence struck the postmaster very forcibly. Never had he heard so few words convey so much meaning.

"Oh, that's all right! I'll see that it is all right," declared Clint.

"Injun see all right 'fore he go," responded the chief, with stately dignity.

"No ante, no show!" cried Mack, hugely tickled by the resistance of the warrior. "Say, postmaster, he's seen government officers afore, and he don't take much stock in them. He's seen Injun agents, he has."

"Big thieves!" said the savage, forcibly.

"I'll have to get the boys to pass the hat around to raise the 'chips,'" Clint observed. "Just wait a moment and I'll fix it all right."

The warrior nodded, and the postmaster went over to the party, who had halted under the shade of some pines—half of them out of the saddle, squatting on the rocks.

Clint briefly explained the matter, and the "boys," loth to lose the fun, soon raised ten dollars among them, and Clint returned with it to the wily red-man.

"There you are chief," he said, as he handed over the money.

The brave received the "ducats" with becoming dignity, and immediately disposed of them about his person; then he rose from his seat, took a look at the hunting-party, into whose service he had just enlisted, then another one down at the muddy road, and announced that he was ready.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

"BETTER tell the crowd to keep back; for if they go cavortin' over the road, it would bother a hull tribe of Injuns to 'lift' the trail!" Mack suggested.

He was an old pioneer, had lived many years on the border, and was pretty well posted in regard to frontier necessities.

Well that the driver gave the caution, for in another minute half a dozen more of the young fellows would have been right down on top of them, for nearly all the company were now in the saddle. Cherokee, Sandy Rocks, and a couple more, were the only exceptions. They had formed a little party under the shelter of a pine, with a big boulder for a table, and were having a little sociable game of seven-up.

"No hurry, boys," Cherokee had observed, coolly, when the dismounted men had rushed so eagerly for their saddles, upon seeing the Indian rise from the rock. "Take it easy! The red fellow will take his time about the thing, and he don't want us down thar till he ciphers the concern out."

So the little party had continued their game, laughing as heartily over the tricks of fortune displayed in the run of the rather soiled painted pictures as if they had been a pack of school-boys playing in the hayloft of an old barn, instead of bearded and bronzed-faced men.

Clint, acting upon the suggestion of the driver, requested the crowd to remain where they were, and give the Indian a show, and although some of the more impulsive members of the cavalcade murmured at the injunction, yet they could not help acknowledging that it was for the best.

Mack conducted the Indian to the spot where the stage had halted at the command of the masked rider. The marks of the wheels were plain; then the driver showed the savage, as near as he could guess, the spot where the white rider had halted at the end of the level.

The quick eyes of the Indian speedily detected the hoof-marks. They were as plain and legible as though a cast of them had been taken in clay.

The savage stooped down and examined the marks; then he took a look at the surroundings.

"He big horse—lame in one hind-leg," explained the chief.

Mack nodded to Clint with an air of satisfaction, but the postmaster was astonished. That any mortal man, white or red, should be able to decide merely from seeing the hoof-prints of a horse, that the animal was large and was lame in one of his legs, and to state distinctly, too, which leg it was, appeared to him to be an impossibility.

"How can you tell that the horse is big and that he is lame?" Clint demanded, his voice and manner both expressing doubt.

The Indian looked at the speaker for a moment, as if unable to comprehend that there could be a pair of eyes in the world which could not read the truth when so plainly written.

"S'pose white brother look," he answered, pointing to the hoof-marks. "See three foot deep, one foot light—hind-foot this side. Hoss lame, go light on that foot, heavy on others."

Clint, upon examination, discovered that three of the prints indeed were much deeper than the other one. He was beginning to believe that nature sometimes teaches more than books.

"But how could you tell that he was a big fellow?" he inquired; "from the size of the hoofs? They are not large ones."

The Indian shook his head.

"Big hoss little foot sometime—sometime little hoss big foot, mebbe," and the savage pointed to an overhanging branch of a cedar tree. "See; hoss him lift up head, bite tree. No able to reach thar if little hoss."

There was no disputing the reasoning of the warrior, for, now that it was pointed out to him, the postmaster could plainly see where the animal had nipped the boughs of the cedar.

"I give up beat!" he confessed.

"Do you s'pose you kin track this here animal?" Mack inquired.

"Me pick him track anywhere," responded the Indian, promptly.

"But kin you tell it from the rest?"

"Me tell!" exclaimed the brave, confidently. "Lose nail, shoe, hind foot—make hoss go lame, lose shoe soon, mebbe."

"I told you he'd fotch it!" cried the driver, triumphantly; "I know'd he'd smell it out!"

"Go ahead!" Clint exclaimed, eager to follow on the trail.

"S'pose white men stay here—let red chief go 'lone—make heap quicker, mebbe."

The two whites at once agreed to the proposal, and the savage, casting off his blanket, commenced to trail the footsteps of the milk-white steed of the Death Shot.

Up the road he went, and disappeared around the bend. Clint and the driver sat down upon a rock, to await his return. They did not have long to sit, for in five minutes he was back again.

Along the road he went, heading toward Cinnabar City, his eyes bent to the ground, and carefully scrutinizing every foot of the way.

"Well?" asked Clint, as the Indian came back to them.

"Hoss went up road not far—go into bush—wait—come out—come back here—track go dere now," and the chief pointed in the direction of Cinnabar City.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Mack, in astonishment.

The fellow probably has a haunt nearer us than we thought for," the postmaster suggested with a grave face.

"Want Injun go more?" asked the chief, reposing hims lf on his blanket.

"Yes, trail her down," Clint answered. "We'll see the thing through."

"My brothers come—little back," said the chief, as he set off along the road, his eyes again bent on the trail.

Past the little cavalcade, sitting so patiently in their saddles, and waiting for developments, the Indian went.

The savage ran his keen eyes swiftly over the group as he passed them; but the little party under the tree escaped his observation.

After the Indian had got past the horsemen, and was following the trail along the road, toward the city, Clint and the stage-driver came up to the group, mounted their horses, and explained matters to the party.

Then they all rode slowly along, following in the rear of the Indian a few hundred feet or more.

The card-party under the tree were just finishing a game, and waited for another deal, and as that settled matters, they mounted their horses and cantering off, overtook the main body just after it had passed the wing-dam shanty.

Straight onward the Indian went, turning neither to the right nor the left.

The members of the tracking party wondered at it, for they expected each moment that the trail would leave the road, and wind off through the wood, or else would cross the river, but it did neither.

"Blazes!" growled Mack, in astonishment, "if this hyer thing goes on we'll track the durned critter into the city itself. Mebbe run him to the ground right in the Occidental Hotel."

Some of the party laughed, but there were many earnest faces among the riders.

It was no joke to discover that the terrible Death Shot of Shasta had a lair so near to the city of Cinnabar.

Straight on the Indian went, until at the very limits of the village, he halted, and announced that he could no longer follow the trail, as so many fresh marks obscured it.

"S'pose you want big, lame hoss and chief that rides him, find him dere!" and the savage pointed to the city of Cinnabar.

CHAPTER XXXI.

O-WA-HE.

THE members of the crowd looked at each other in astonishment. Could it be possible that the strangely-disguised road-agent was really one of the citizens of Cinnabar? They could hardly believe it.

"Say, Injun, are you sure that you haven't made some mistake in this hyer matter?" one of the crowd asked.

The savage drew himself up in stolid dignity.

"Injun know—Injun say big lame horse go dere," he replied, and he again pointed into the town.

There were puzzled faces and knitted brows among the riders as they listened to this positive assurance of the Indian.

"Jest what I've thought, all along!" Mack exclaimed. "How in thunder did the cuss know that thar was plunder hid in the coach unless he was in the town and got wind of it some way? Blest if I knew that we had it aboard myself till he 'lifted' it so pooty."

"If this hyer thing goes on, I reckon we'll have to raise the vigilantes," one of the crowd remarked, soberly, and after he spoke, one or two others added words of the same import.

"Well, our little job is up, gentlemen," decided the postmaster, "but I reckon we have discovered more than we bargained for, and if we really want to catch this fellow, we had better search the shanties of the city rather than waste time fooling round the country."

"Got 'nuff of chief?" the Indian asked.

"Yes, that's all, unless you think that you could trace the horse into the town."

The Indian shook his head.

"Trail lost here," he replied, briefly, and he swept his hand down to the earth. "Too much hoss—no find 'um."

"Good-by, old fellow; hire you again when we have another job like this on hand," the postmaster sung out.

The savage inclined his head gravely, and the horsemen rode on. The chief remained motionless by the side of the road while the horsemen rode past him, but when long-bearded Cherokee came along, the last man in the party, the Indian betrayed decided symptoms of astonishment.

The horsemen galloped on at a brisk pace, and the Indian, after hesitating for a moment, as if he was deliberating what to do, suddenly started and followed after the horsemen at a long, loping trot, by means of which he got over the ground very rapidly.

The party rode straight to the Occidental Hotel and dismounted to indulge in the refreshment so common in the mining region—and elsewhere, too, for that matter, for it is not the rough borderers who drink all the liquor.

The party were in the saloon of the hotel when the Indian came up. Through the window he could easily see the members of the convivial crowd.

A miner, dead broke, was lounging by the case-ment, quietly gazing upon the jovial gang and inwardly wishing that he was with them.

The sudden appearance of the massive face of the savage over his shoulder quite startled the miner, and he turned in some little alarm.

"How?" said the savage, gutturally; "me friend. See, big white chief, long hair—long hair on chin; what chief's name?" and he pointed to Cherokee.

"That one with ha'r nearly black?"

"That 'um."

"I heard his name was Cherokee."

The Indian shook his head: it was evident that he was not satisfied.

"Wa-al, that's all I sarry 'bout it," the miner said, "but thar's the chief cook of the concern," and he pointed to the landlord of the Occidental, Yorker, who happened to appear at the door of the hotel just then; "mebbe he'll be able to tell you more."

The Indian started instantly for Yorker, leaving the miner in a state of considerable astonishment.

The landlord of the Occidental did not notice the savage until he got quite close to him.

"My brother is chief of the big wigwam?" inquired the Indian, gravely.

"Yes, I run the shanty," Yorker replied, expecting that the noble red-man wished to beg for some cold victuals.

"Chief know all warriors eat with him in big wigwam?"

Yorker felt relieved when he found that the untutored son of the forest desired information and was not hungry.

"Oh, yes, I know 'em all."

"Big chief—Dick Talbot—know?"

The unsuspecting Indian, when he put the innocent question, had no idea of the consternation which it would cause.

Yorker staggered back as if he had been stricken in the face. He turned deadly pale, although he was naturally a florid, red-faced man, and big drops of sweat rolled from his forehead like lumps of melted wax.

"What do you mean?" gasped the landlord, evidently in an agony of terror.

The Indian gazed at the terrified man in wonder; the cause of his emotion was a mystery to the mind of the red chief.

"Me want Injun Dick Talbot—he here, me think," the warrior answered, simply.

"Hyer!" cried the landlord; "good heavens! no! It can't be possible!" and then Yorker ran hurriedly into the house and banged the door in the face of the red chief—not that he intended to affront the latter, but the landlord of the Occidental was in such a dreadful state of mind that he didn't know exactly what he was doing. His only thought was to hurry up-stairs and provide himself with more weapons, and he already bristled all over with pistols and knives, a regular walking arsenal.

"Big white chief mad!" muttered the Indian, even his cold and taciturn mind astonished by the unaccountable actions of the burly landlord of the Occidental.

The chief, after delivering this verdict, walked back to the window, which, by this time, the miner had vacated, and peered in at the assemblage.

The drinking party was just about breaking up, and the savage perceived, to his intense satisfaction, that the long-bearded man, in whom he appeared to take such interest, was about to come forth.

The group came from the saloon, chatted for a minute or two upon the door-stoop, and then Cherokee excused himself to the rest and passed down the street.

Quietly, like a dog following hard upon the heel of his master, the savage followed after Cherokee.

There was an unoccupied block just below the hotel, where one of the devouring fires, that are so common and destructive to the wooden towns of the West, had swept a clean path for itself.

Half-way across the vacant lot, Cherokee happened to look behind him, and beheld the Indian close upon him.

A slight shade passed over Cherokee's bearded face; he halted and half turned. The Indian came slowly up and faced him.

For a minute, at least, the bearded adventurer, known to the men of Cinnabar as Cherokee, and the wandering Indian, of the far-off Blackfoot nation, faced each other. Both faces like marble, both equally calm and passive.

The savage was the first to speak.

"O-wa-he is a great chief—he had a brother once, white skin, but red heart. Can the long-haired white man tell the red chief where he can find the white brother that he has traveled many moons to see?"

There was a touching plaintiveness in the voice of the savage, seldom heard in the accents of the iron children of the wood and the prairie.

Cherokee slowly shook his head.

"The chief is poor; he has traveled till his moccasins are worn out, and his feet are sore. Will his white brother take him to his lodge, that the red man may rest?"

Again Cherokee shook his head, but he took from his pocket a little bag of coin, and offered it to the Indian.

With a single gesture, the brave declined the gift, folded his blanket tightly around him, and, turning, walked slowly away, with bended head.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

THE sun was slowly sinking to its bed in the far Pacific, on that warm Saturday afternoon, and a holy, peaceful calm seemed to pervade all nature.

Old Joe Ugly had knocked off work early, and under the shelter of the bank he sat, figuring away on a small piece of paper.

He was making out an account of the result of the week's work, to present to his partner, long-haired Cherokee. It was the first balance-sheet that the owner of the wing-dam claim had ever troubled himself to make out.

"A splendid week's work, too!" he muttered, as he finished his account, and looked at the footing up. "I s'pose Cherokee 'll stand it. From what I know of him I should say that he was not the man to go back on his word; 'sides, there's the contract."

Slowly and thoughtfully the old man read over the account, which was as follows:

WING-DAM CLAIM.

Joseph Ugly, three-fourths; Cherokee, one-fourth.

ACCOUNT FOR WEEK ENDING APRIL 22, 1869.

PRODUCE ACCOUNT.

Dust.....\$16 04

Cherokee, $\frac{1}{4}$ share..... 4 01

Cherokee, by cash..... 3 49

7 50

EXPENSE ACCOUNT.

One workman, 6 days, at \$5 00 per day.....\$30 00

Cherokee, $\frac{1}{4}$ share..... 7 50

7 50

"There, I think that is about the thing," the old man observed, complacently. "He forks me over three dollars and forty-nine cents, and the ten-dollar

order for groceries at Pollock's, and the account is square."

"Do you suppose that he will submit to such an imposition, father?" asked Elinore suddenly. She had quietly approached the old man, and looking over his shoulder, had beheld the precious balance-sheet.

Ugly was annoyed. He had not told his daughter anything at all in reference to disposing of a part of the mine to Cherokee, and it made him angry to think that she should have discovered it.

"What do you mean by talking that way?" he demanded, angrily. "What do you know 'bout business? This is business, this is; you women folk don't know nothing 'bout such things."

"I don't think that it requires much knowledge of business to detect such a transparent fraud as this," she replied, quietly, pointing to the paper the old man held in his hand. After hearing this decided opinion, Ugly immediately pocketed the balance sheet—as if such an action would avail to stop the tongue of an angry woman. For the girl, Elinore, was angry; two bright spots were glowing in her cheeks, and her bosom was heaving like the waves of a stormy sea.

Old Ugly was one of those peculiar men who are always blind, except when their own comfort or interest is concerned. He noticed that the girl was agitated, but thought that it was merely petulance produced by his reproof.

"Are you going to swindle this man out of his money in this bare-faced way?" she demanded, her eyes flashing, and her whole form convulsed with passion.

Ugly opened his eyes wide in astonishment. Never before, in all his life, had he heard his daughter use such a tone, either to him or any one else.

"Who—who—what do you mean?" he stammered, becoming weak and irresolute in the presence of a will stronger than his own.

"Just exactly what I said," she replied, her voice clear and sweet, and yet trembling with intense passion. "Are you going to cheat this man, Cherokee, out of this paltry sum of money?"

"You don't know anything 'bout it, my dear," old Ugly replied, in his aimless, feeble way. "This is a regular business operation."

"I know all about it!" she exclaimed, fiercely. "I overheard the whole bargain when it was made, and I did not know at which I should wonder the most, your weak, pitiful knavery or his cunning scheme."

"There, my dear, you talk just as foolish and as nonsensical as a woman always does, when she gets in a passion. You're a good girl, but you can't argue; 'tain't your fault—none of your sex can; 'tain't in 'em," the old man answered, attempting to appease the girl's anger. "Now how can I cheat the man if he is cunning?"

A bitter sneer curled the ripe, red lips of the girl, but she did not speak.

"If you heard the whole affair," continued the old man, "you know how it came about. He wanted to buy a quarter of the claim, although I told him that it wasn't a very productive one; I told him that, Nell, fair and honest; you must have heard it. Now, do me justice! Well, after he heard that, he made an offer for a quarter share, set his own terms and made his own contract. If he loses money at it, isn't that his look-out? If you women only understood business, you'd see that the thing is just as square as can be. He might make a good thing out of it, you know."

"How?" asked the girl, her lip curling in contempt.

"Why, if I should happen to strike a rich lead, and take out fifty to a hundred dollars a day, he'd make a big thing out of it."

"And what possible chance is there of that?"

"Well, there ain't much, I admit; but, you see, when a man speculates he takes his risk about that sort of thing."

"What kind of a man is this Cherokee?" the girl asked, suddenly—"a fool that anybody can twist around the finger?"

"Oh, I guess not!" exclaimed old Ugly in astonishment. "I guess that there arn't many men in this town any sharper than Cherokee. He's no fool, but as long-headed a fellow as I ever saw."

"And yet he allows himself to be entrapped into a contract with you, in which all the gain is on your side and all the loss on his?"

The old man, blind in his selfishness, took this to be a compliment.

"Well, you see, Nell, your poor old father is too much for some of these sharp people sometimes," he chuckled; "you just wait; I'll fetch it yet!"

A deep sigh came from the girl's lips; she began to despair.

"Father!" she cried abruptly, "you play cards with this Cherokee sometimes?"

"Oh, yes, just to pass away the time," he admitted, endeavoring to appear careless and unconcerned.

"You play for money too?"

"Just enough to make it interesting, that's all."

"Suppose that you should sit down to play with this man sometime, and he should propose before you began that the stakes, in every game, should go to you, whether you won or not?"

"Oh, that would be ridiculous!" the old man cried, falling blindly into the trap which she had laid.

"There wouldn't be any fun in playing. It's the excitement and the uncertainty that makes the game interesting."

"And yet when you play at gold-mining you make just such an arrangement! You to win and he to lose all the time."

"My dear child, you don't understand it at all! This is business!" old Ugly persisted. It was very plain that with him the word business covered a multitude of sins.

"And what is the reason he is willing to let you cheat him out of twelve or fifteen dollars every week?" Elinore demanded, a fierce light shining from her eyes.

"How do you suppose I know?" the old man replied, in his feeble, hopeless way. "What makes you ask such a question? You don't know anything about business, anyway, so don't bother about it."

"And yet, if I do not know anything about business, I think that I know why this man allows you to get the better of him." The girl spoke calmly but contemptuously.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A WEAK OLD MAN.

OLD Ugly looked at Elinore for a moment, as if he was not quite certain that he had understood her meaning.

"You think you know why he wanted to go in partnership with me in the mine?"

"Yes," replied the girl, decidedly.

"Oh, I see; you think I talked him into believing that there was a big stake in the claim," and the old man chuckled. He felt pleased that he should be complimented upon his cunning.

The girl sighed and an expression of pain passed over her beautiful face. She saw only too plainly what an utter and miserable wreck her once proud and upright father had become.

"I know a thing or two," the old fellow said, with a wise shake of the head.

"That is not the reason, father. How often do you see this Cherokee?" she demanded.

"Only when I go in town."

"And yet for the past two weeks there has hardly been a day when he has not been lurking around this house."

Old Ugly looked at his daughter in wonder.

"Why, what's the matter with you, Nelly?" he said, soothingly; "you must be dreaming." The old man really began to believe that his daughter's mind was affected.

"I am not dreaming!" she cried, almost fiercely.

"But you may wake some day and find that you have been dreaming. I tell you, father, that nearly every day for the last two weeks I have seen him lurking around this place. There are cracks in the side of the house looking to the hillside, and through them I have watched this man without his knowledge."

"What do you s'pose brings him?" asked Ugly.

"That is for you to guess."

"As for the other fellow," observed the old man, very abruptly, "this Sandy Rocks, I reckon I know what he's been hanging 'round here for, and throwing dead birds and rabbits and such trash against my door!" He spoke with contempt of Sandy's gifts, yet had always eaten heartily of them, and without any compunctions.

The girl's face colored up slightly at the mention of the name, but she held her ground with firm determination.

"And what does he want?" she asked.

"A young lady about your size, I guess," and the old man smiled.

"Course I wouldn't allow such a thing!" he added, indignantly. "He's a good fellow enough, but wait till I've made a nit and then I'll take you back East and you can marry in your own circle," and as the old man spoke, so strong was his imagination, that the Shasta valley, lava rocks, flowing stream, wing-dam shanty, golden sands, all had faded from his vision, and again he stood amid the blaze of the gas-lights and the crush of the ball, silks to the right and satins to the left, half a dozen bank-presidents in the rear, and the honored mayor of the great city shaking hands with him, and expressing his pleasure that his esteemed friend had once again taken his place amid the great ones of the East.

But to the daughter, what hollow mockery there was in the candied words of empty fashion! Her own circle? What was it now? The rocks and pines of the Shasta valley; the rattlesnake her escort; the howl of the mountain wolf and the scream of the preying eagle the music of her orchestra; and yet, she had been reared surrounded by every luxury.

A long-drawn sigh came from the girl's lips and the sound aroused the old man from his day-dream.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"The matter!" she cried, bitterly. "It makes my very heart ache when I hear you speak of returning to the East. Do you forget what we left behind us? Do you think that all the gold that lies hid in these mountains would cover up the shame?"

"Oh, nonsense! Gold will cover up anything. When a man has got plenty of money he can do almost anything. Gold won't make the blind see, but it will make clear, keen eyes very near-sighted."

"A million of dollars would not hire me to return to the East," the girl announced, decisively.

"Well, you can stay here then, but just as soon as I make a strike and get fifty or a hundred thousand dollars together, I'm going! I'm going to beat those Wall street robbers at their own game. I'll get hold of a stock and catch 'em short of it, and, oh! won't I put the screws on—two hundred to settle, gentlemen, and quick too, or up she goes higher, aha!" And the old wreck of a man rubbed his hands together and chuckled with glee. He talked of a hundred thousand dollars, and he could only count his money by cents. "You can stay here, if you want to," he added, "and marry that tow-headed giant."

"Or this long-bearded gentleman who allows you to swindle him so easily," she suggested, bitterly.

"Well, there ain't much difference between them."

"Except that one is a miner and the other gets his living by cards."

"Everybody plays cards hyer," the old man responded, testily. "So they do East, only they keep more quiet about it. All the world gambles more or less; trade is all one great cheating operation; not half so honest as regular card-playing."

"You say so because in the world's battle you have been beaten," Elinore rejoined.

"No, I was not beaten; I was cheated by a set of rogues who called themselves Christian gentlemen, who pretended to be my friends, and who stole my money!" exclaimed the old man, violently.

"But this contract!" returning suddenly to the original subject. "Will you not give it up?"

"No, I won't! do you want me to starve?" cried old Ugly in an injured tone.

"I would rather starve than live upon the charity of this stranger!" Elinore declared, spiritedly.

"Tain't charity at all: it's a fair bargain, but you women don't understand nothing 'bout business." The old man happened just then to take a look up at the far western horizon and saw that the sun had disappeared. "I must be off!" he said, rising.

"Will you not stay for supper?"

"No; I am going take supper at the Occidental with some of the boys, and I'll tell you what it is, Nelly, I'll just talk both to Sandy Rocks and Cherokee 'bout coming 'round here; I'll put a stop to it."

Elinore looked her father straight in the face and she saw by the expression there that he had not the

slightest intention of doing anything of the kind. But she did not speak; all remonstrance she saw was useless. She felt that a mysterious power, stronger than her own will, was hurrying her onward, and like a fatalist she yielded, unresisting, to destiny.

Old Ugly started off for the city, making haste to get away so as to escape further conversation with his daughter. To use his favorite expression, "there was no reasoning with a woman."

Upon arriving in the city, Ugly discovered Cherokee standing in front of the Occidental, and he immediately exhibited to him the balance sheet of the week, skillfully concealing his apprehension that his partner might naturally find fault at being required to pay out money instead of receiving it, by explaining to him that it was the best week that he, Ugly, had ever known at the mine, and as the product had exceeded the preceding week by some five dollars, the outlook was extremely favorable that the next week would exhibit a decided increase over the present one.

Greatly to Ugly's comfort, Cherokee only remarked that they had better deposit the dust, and the two proceeded down to the express office for that purpose. That operation performed, Cherokee took Ugly to Pollock's store, and informed the store-keeper that the old man was good for ten dollars' worth of stuff, and to charge to his—Cherokee's—account. But, after this was finished, as the two proceeded up the street, old Ugly suddenly made the discovery that the net result of his contract with Cherokee was to deprive him of all ready money until the end of the month. And as he had come to town with the intention of winning a small fortune that night at poker, this was extremely disagreeable. He determined to borrow a small sum from the obliging Cherokee.

The two entered the Occidental and sat down at a table for supper.

The "army" of the Clear-grit Sharp were not three yards off.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BULLY DELIBERATES.

ONCE again the sable mantle of night covered in the thriving city of Cinnabar. Once again the saloons had illuminated their windows and prepared to dispense creature comfort to the hard-handed miners of the Shasta valley.

One by one the brawny, huge-bearded sons of toil had come trooping in to the center, all intent upon enjoying a few hours of pleasure after the toils of the day.

It was early in the evening, and the regular sports of the night had not yet begun. Cinnabar City rarely unbended itself until after nine o'clock at night.

Standing in front of the Occidental Hotel were two men well known to our readers—two men of the redoubtable "army" that had enlisted under the banner of the Clear-grit Sharp.

To come at once to the point, the two were Jack Ball and his fellow-bravo, Dennis Shannon.

Our readers will remember that in the peculiar death-lottery devised by the creative wits of the Clear-grit Sharp, Ball had been "elected" to accomplish the death of the long-bearded Cherokee.

And as the two stood before the door of the hotel, it was upon this very subject they were conversing.

Ball, heavily jawed and scant of brain, had pondered long and thoughtfully over the subject. Exactly how to set about the difficult task he knew not. If Cherokee had been an almost unknown miner, dwelling in some secluded cabin among the hills, the task would have been a comparatively easy one. Mr. Ball would have laid in wait for him some dark night, and would have hit him over the head with as little ceremony as if he had been a polecat instead of a man.

But the able and accomplished master of the art of poker-playing dwelt within the Occidental Hotel. He was not much in the habit of promenading after nightfall, and upon the two or three occasions that the watchful Ball had succeeded in discovering Cherokee alone, that gentleman had manifested such an interest in his surroundings, that Ball, with all his cunning, had never been able to get within striking distance of his destined victim.

"Bless me hif it don't look to me as hif the bloated an' hideous that some cove was a-layin' for 'im!" Mr. Ball said, in confidence to his chum, Shannon.

"Bedad, it looks like it!" the Irishman said.

"I've been arter 'im for three days now and I'm getting tired of the blasted thing," Ball growled.

"He's in here ivery night," Shannon suggested, indicating the hotel as he spoke.

"Yes, well I know it!" Ball replied; "but what chance 'as a man at 'im in this blasted place with 'is crowd round 'im?"

"Shure! he's a high-toned gentleman; why not go in an' pick a quarrel wid him; he'd be obligated for to fight yees," the Irishman suggested.

"I'd a big sight rather get a lick at him in the dark," Ball confessed.

"But if you can't, how can you? Shure! ye are a bigger man than he. Why shouldn't ye git the better of him in a fair fight?"

"I've heard that he's quicker'n lightning on the shoot," Ball intimated.

"Try him wid the knife!" proposed Shannon.

"I'd a mighty sight rather pound 'im with my fists," the Englishman returned.

"Shure that is as good a way as any, but it's not likely to kill him," Shannon observed.

"I don't know about that. If I kin git a lick at 'im, good and square, I wouldn't give much for his life after it."

"Ye'll have the advantage on yeer side, anyway," the Irishman suggested.

"Well, I jest bet you I will! I wish that I 'ad a dollar for every time I've put my 'ands up in a twenty-four foot ring."

"But the blaggard may not be willing to fight you wid his fists?"

"I guess that I can fix it so that he will have to," the Englishman replied, in his dogged, surly way.

"He's a pipe-stem feller, an' hif I get a fair 'ug on 'im oncet, I kin squeeze the very life out of 'im."

"I'll go bail that you will do that same!" the Irishman exclaimed, in admiration.

"S'pose you jest skin round town han' run the boys up 'ere," Ball said. "We'll need all our crowd when the trouble begins."

"I'm off, as the cartridge said to the gun when the

cap flashed, do ye mind!" and with a broad grin upon his ugly features, Shannon started.

It did not take him very long to discover the whereabouts of the members of the army.

Velarde, the Mexican, was in a little monte "shop," kept by a fellow greaser at the lower end of the town. Yuba was down at his old quarters, the jail, just run into the calaboose for attempting to "clean out" the inmates of a low shanty of very doubtful reputation, situated half-way between the "city" and its flourishing suburb, Angel's Bar.

After a long parley with the jailer, Shannon succeeded in getting Yuba released—upon parole—the gentle William pledging his word of honor as a gentleman and a scholar that he would return to durance vile before morning.

This skillful operation cost the friendly Irishman one dollar and fifty cents—"refreshments." Prisoner, jailer and friend had all adjourned to a neighboring saloon to talk the matter over.

But for a time the whereabouts of the veteran bummer, Joe Bowers, puzzled the rest of the "army." High and low through Cinnabar town they sought for the man of rags and fluent speech. Diligently they questioned, but all without avail, until at last a dirty youth, hearing of the search, volunteered the information that "thar was a fat an' greasy cuss asleep in his old man's hog-pen."

That this was the veteran, Bowers, no one of the searchers for a moment doubted, and they proceeded at once to the spot, and there, sure enough, curled up asleep with the mother pig and three little ones, was the bummer.

From his heavy breathing, it was evident that Joseph Bowers, Esq., had been indulging to excess in strong liquors.

"Oh, mother of Moses! to slape wid the pigs!" exclaimed the Irishman, in astonishment.

"I reckon he don't keer much!" Yuba observed. "He smells worse nor the pigs, any time. He's a reg'lar walking distillery. You kin smell whisky ef he's anywhere within a mile."

Ball did not make any remark upon the subject, but he climbed over the fence of the pig-pen and began to boot the sleeping man in a most vigorous and scientific manner.

Mr. Bowers awoke instantly, and sat up, a look of indignation upon his discolored face.

"Go 'way—lemme 'lonel!" he cried. "How dare you come and disturb a gentleman in his hotel?"

By this time he got his eyes fairly open, and discovered who his assailants were.

"Now, boys, this hyer is rough!" he complained. "What you 'bout, comin' and cavoring round hyer and 'sturbung people? The landlord will raise blazes!"

"Do yees know where ye are?" Shannon inquired.

"Cert', old man," replied Mr. Bowers, promptly. "Occidental Hotel, room 10," and then the bummer glanced up at the sky in a bewildered sort of way.

"Well, jest kick me to death with crimples, if somebody hain't gone and taken the roof off!"

"See hyer, you're snoozing down with the shoats!" Yuba exclaimed, swinging the lantern that he carried, so that Bowers could examine the locality.

Mr. Bowers appeared at first to be greatly astonished, then he struck his hand to his head in the theatrical manner so peculiar to him.

"Oh, I do remember me, my noble dook! Jest 'cos I was a leetle obfuscated with fire-water, they h'isted me from the door of the Occidental, and I feel a sensation ahind as if some galoot had throw'd a good-sized leather valise arter me. Then I wandered on, and I wept for man's inhumanity to his brother sport, till I tumbled over this hyer fence, and the animals received me with open arms. Kicked out by a slab-sided cuss, this noble ole mother of shoats took me in. Such things will happen sometimes."

After this explanation, the bummer got upon his feet, all trace of liquor disappearing as if by magic, and announced that he was ready to go with the party.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UGLY'S DEGRADATION.

WITHIN the Occidental Hotel there was the sound of revelry and mirth.

Nine o'clock had just struck and both bar-room and "Gentlemen's Parlor," back of it were pretty well filled with people.

The bar of the Occidental was reputed to be stocked with the best liquors kept in town, and then, too, tolerably good order was always preserved there. Not that the proprietor of the hotel had much to do with that, for it depended more upon the customers, and they were the best men that the town could boast of. If, once in a while, some drunken and quarrelsome stranger came into the saloon, determined upon a fight, there was not wanting a score of willing hands to speedily transport the offending brawler to the classic precincts of the calaboose, and the operation was performed, too, with such speed, and so entirely devoid of ceremony, that, to use the language of a guileless citizen of Hangman's Hollow—a gulch some ten miles distant from the city in the mountains—who came into the bar-room of the Occidental Hotel with a yell and a whoop, and proclaimed that he was "chief," and could "get away" with any two-legged Cinnabar critter: "I landed in that darned ole calaboose so quick that it made my head swim!"

There was no gaming saloon attached to the Occidental, but if there was any boastful individual who flattered himself that he could handle the "papers," and was "spilling" to indulge in the festive game of poker, there were the tables in the "Gentlemen's Parlor," quite at his service, and there were plenty of gentlemen, who made the Occidental their headquarters, who were delighted to "assist" the sanguine man in getting rid of his money.

The "Gentlemen's Parlor," a good-sized apartment about fifteen by twenty, was immediately back of the bar-room; a door connected it with the saloon.

There were eight tables in the room, the said tables being merely slabs of wood fastened to the wall at one end and supported by a single leg at the other. The room served also as the restaurant of the hotel where meals, at a dollar a head, were served at all hours.

Quite a jovial party was in the room as the clock struck nine. Clint McAlpine, the postmaster; Spea-

cer Waite, the resigned mayor of the town; Leo Pollock, the storekeeper; Judge Bob Candy, and Sandy Rocks, the miner, were sitting at one of the little tables, devouring canned oysters, and telling wonderful stories.

Clint had just finished giving a description of his interview with the strange Indian, when Cherokee, followed by old man Ugly, entered the room.

Ugly had been on the look-out for the long-haired Cherokee for some time. He had posted himself by the door of the saloon quite early, as he had felt certain that Cherokee would come to his accustomed resort in the Gentlemen's Parlor before the evening was over.

The old man was not in the best of humor; while he had been waiting for Cherokee, he had been invited to drink two or three times, and the liquor had produced its accustomed effect upon him.

"See here, Cherokee, lend me ten dollars!" exclaimed the old man, seizing hold of a button of the long-bearded man's coat.

"Can't do it!" replied Cherokee, decidedly.

The old man drew himself up with an air of wounded dignity.

"You won't lend me ten dollars?"

"No, I won't," the other answered, bluntly.

"Perhaps you don't think I'm good for ten dollars!" old Ugly exclaimed.

"Oh, that's all right," Cherokee returned, evasively; "but I want all the money I've got for myself."

"Are you going to play poker?" demanded the old man, eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know; I may take a hand in just for fun if any of the boys start a game," Cherokee answered, carelessly.

"I'll tell you what it is, Cherokee, I feel that, if I play to-night, I shall win something big," the old man observed, in a confident whisper. "If you'll lend me ten dollars, so that I can play, I will give you half of all that I win."

"See here, old man, I wouldn't lend you ten cents to play cards with!" The long-bearded man spoke decidedly.

"Why not?" persisted old Ugly, fiercely. "What is it your business what I do with my own money?"

"But it isn't your money; it's my money that you want to play with," retorted Cherokee. "Now, you might as well make up your mind first as last. No money do you get out of me this night, or any other night either, to gamble away at cards."

"You gamble!" exclaimed the old man; "that's the way you make your living. How dare you talk to me—a man that's old enough to be your father—about gambling? I played cards before your were born!"

"And that's the reason why you are such a poor, old, miserable wretch now," Cherokee replied, coolly, never in the least heeding the taunt of the enraged old miner. "If you had let cards and liquor alone when you were my age you wouldn't be where you are now."

"And where am I?" demanded old Ugly, quivering with passion; "how dare you, you contemptible gambler, talk to me?"

"A gambler is better than a fugitive from justice any day in the week," Cherokee answered, meaningly.

The manner of the old man changed at once; he glanced around him in a nervous way, and the great wax-like drops of perspiration started out upon his wrinkled forehead.

Cherokee saw that his chance shot had struck home, and what before had only been suspicion was now a certainty.

"Hush!" exclaimed the old man, nervously; "there's no need of saying such things as that. Who knows, some of those fellows over there"—and he indicated the jovial party discussing their oysters as he spoke—"some of 'em might have had to run away from the East, and it would hurt their feelings if they heard you speak as you did just now. But say, Cherokee, can't you lend me ten dollars?" and the old man's voice grew pathetic. "I am jest as sure of winning to-night as that I'm standing here. I know it. I can allers tell when I'm going to win. Ten dollars ain't much to a man like you, even if I lose it. It will make me happy for a little time anyway, but I'm sure to win, and I say, Cherokee, you're a man that I have a high opinion of. You're jest the kind of man that I would like to have come and visit at my house. You know my daughter, Nelly? She's a nice girl, Cherokee, a lady bred and born; there was a time when she held up her head with the best of 'em; that was before I was unfortunate. Now, she's kinder lonely, for no one ever comes to the house, and I think that it would do her good to see a little company. 'Tisn't every man that I'd be willing to trust, but I say to you, fair and honest, I'd like to have you come, partner."

A peculiar look had come over Cherokee's pale face as he listened. Never until that hour had he realized how fully a man could be enslaved by the twin demons of play and strong drink.

"I'm very much obliged to you, but perhaps the young lady might object."

"Not if I say that it's all right!" Ugly exclaimed; "she's a good girl—does whatever I tell her. I should be proud to have you come. Say, Cherokee, you can lend me that ten dollars, can't you?"

"There's that ten-dollar order for groceries on Pollock," Cherokee suggested, with an innocent face.

"That's an infernal swindle, Cherokee!" growled the old man, with an injured air. "I sold that to a miner for five dollars, and when he went to Pollock, Pollock said that it wasn't any good unless presented by me, and that he should deliver the goods at my shanty, and I had to give the five dollars back, 'cos the miner wouldn't bother with it. Now, Cherokee, you put up that job to swindle me out of ten dollars," and the old man shook his head sorrowfully.

Cherokee was about to defend himself from this aspersion when he was interrupted by quite a little crowd pouring into the saloon. It was the Clear-grit Sharp and his "army," and after them followed the Blackfoot brave.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

UGLY "PLAYS IT" ON SANDY.

Brown and his comrades marched up to the bar of the saloon, and as they passed within six feet of Cherokee, he got a good view of them.

Nearly all of the party were well known by sight to our long-bearded hero, but it was the first time that he had ever come in contact with the Clear-grit Sharp, and it was very evident, from the look upon Cherokee's face, that there was something about the cool Mr. Brown that astonished him.

Even the old man noticed it, and yet his senses were dulled with liquor.

"What is it, partner?" asked Ugly, coaxingly; "you seem surprised."

"Do you know the parties that just came in?" Cherokee said, in an absent sort of way.

Old Ugly took a good look at the new-comers.

"I know one of them," he replied, "the tall, thin fellow in black; his name is Brown. Some of the boys pointed him out to me. They say he plays a very good game of poker; the boys call him the Clear-grit Sharp. He owns Clear-grit lode."

"A good poker-player, eh?" Cherokee observed, in an absent sort of way.

"Yes; but you just lend me that ten dollars, and I'll skin him for you!" suggested the old man, eagerly.

"I reckon he'd skin you."

"P'raps you think that I don't know how to play cards."

"Not well enough to play on my money," Cherokee replied.

"All right," the old fellow muttered; "all right, if you think that you are acting just square in this matter."

"I reckon that if you were to go down to Pollock's store, get that order filled, then take your plunder and start for home, you would feel a great deal better in the morning than if you had staid hyer and played poker and got blind drunk," Cherokee observed, very decidedly.

The old man drew himself up with an air of dignity.

"If you will allow me to observe, I am not accountable to you, sir, for my actions; and I will further remark that you are not the only person in the world that takes an interest in the inmates of the wing-dam shanty."

Cherokee looked at his "partner" for a moment in silence, a smile curling the corners of his mouth.

"Ugly, I am beginning to believe that you are a darned sight worse than I thought you was."

"Will you lend me ten dollars?" whined the old man, doggedly.

"No, I won't—not to play poker with; but if you want the money for anything else, I'll lend you twenty with pleasure."

"I do not usually allow any one to dictate to me how I shall dispose of my money," the old chap said, angrily. "Mind, I've given you the first chance; now, if I go and talk to any one else, and that party obliges me with a loan, you needn't complain."

"I'm not your master, and if you choose to—Well, there's no use talking about it," and Cherokee turned and advanced to the door of the saloon.

A muttered curse rose to the old miner's lips, and then, spying Sandy Rocks sitting at the table in the inner room, he immediately went up to him.

"Good-evenin', Sandy," he said; "I want to talk to you for a moment."

Sandy rose from the table, a suspicious look upon his face, and followed the old man over into a corner. The younger miner was afraid that he was to be called to account for his delicate manner of presenting fresh-killed game to the inmates of the wing-dam shanty.

"Mr. Rocks, you are a man after my own heart!" declared Ugly, laying hold of the lapel of the loose jacket which Sandy wore. "There is a freshness and a candor about your actions that I cannot admire too highly. Allow me, in the name of both my daughter and myself, to thank you for those little trifling gifts which you heaved at our door in such an ingenious way. Better birds and rabbits I don't think I ever eat. Did you shoot 'em yourself?"

"No, I bought 'em of the Johns," just a little confused.

"Of course; quite correct; I might have known that you couldn't afford to lose your valuable time prancing round with a gun on your shoulder. But, Mr. Rocks, I can not really consent to be under an obligation to you in this little matter. Won't you allow me to reimburse you the trifling sums that you expended for those kind and thoughtful presents?" and the old man put his hand into his empty pocket with as much dignity and grace as though he fingered countless ounces of gold.

But Sandy protested that he couldn't hear of such a thing, and so, with easy politeness, Ugly yielded the point.

"But, really we must devise some way to repay these little delicate attentions. Nelly and I were talking the matter over last night, and if you haven't any other engagement, we shall be pleased to have you come to dinner with us to-morrow."

Sandy blushed like a school-boy and tried to stammer out an excuse, but old Ugly would not take no for an answer, and so, finally, the miner agreed to come.

"Nelly will be delighted," declared the old man. "She has a very high opinion of you. There isn't another man in town that I would care to have come into my house. Well, I must be going; I've got to purchase a few articles before I start for home. I wanted to surprise Nelly with a new dress and some few ribbons, and such like woman-fixings, for to-morrow; of course she wants to fix up a little, if she's going to receive company, but I'm so very short to-night that I don't believe I'll be able to do it." The old fellow spoke in a meditative sort of way, and then an idea seemed suddenly to occur to him. "Oh, perhaps you've got ten dollars about you that you don't want to use before next week?" and the unscrupulous old sinner fixed his fish-like eyes upon the honest face of the yellow-bearded Sandy.

Taken completely off his guard by Ugly's announcement of his immediate return home, Sandy was only too glad to haul out his money and count out ten dollars into the trembling hands.

Ugly's dull eyes snapped and glistened as he beheld the shining metal.

"I'm very much obliged to you," he said; "won't you join me in a social glass?"

Sandy begged hard to be excused, for he was no drinker; but the old man insisted, and after the bar was patronized, Ugly left the hotel, saying that he

might drop in again before he left for the wing-dam shanty.

At these words, Sandy experienced the unpleasant sensation that usually comes to a man when he discovers that his good nature has been abused.

"I reckon that he's played it on me!" growled the creditor.

Cherokee had noticed the conversation going on between the old man and Sandy, and his lips curled in contempt.

"The old wretch would sell the girl to gratify his mad desire for gambling!" he muttered. "And he thinks to play this miner off against me, as if I cared two straws for the girl—or for any other human being," he added, with bitterness, and as he spoke, he stepped from the hotel out into the air.

The army had watched Cherokee's movement, and Joe Bowers said, quickly, to the rest:

"I'll see if he's 'heeled'; watch me!"

Then Bowers rushed out of the door, as if he was in a terrible hurry, and came plump up against Cherokee.

The concussion was so violent, that if Bowers had not thrown his arms about Cherokee, both would have come to the ground.

"Keep your eyes open, ole man; you're in danger!" Bowers said, rapidly, in Cherokee's ear; then, with a hundred apologies for his carelessness, the bummer returned, smilingly, to the saloon.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MUD-TURTLE AGAIN.

"WELL, is he 'heeled'?" asked Ball, eagerly, as Bowers returned.

"Heeled!" cried Mr. Bowers, excitedly. "You jest bet! I felt two revolvers and a couple of bowie-knives around his waist!"

The Englishman looked disgusted at this information.

"You'll have to try the fair fight dodge," the Clear-grit Sharp said, in his cool way. "It wouldn't be of much use, anyway, to attempt to use fire-arms in a crowded room. We would be certain to miss and hit some innocent cuss, and then the town would be too hot to hold us. The hull thing must be managed fair and above-board. You took a good look at him, Ball?"

"Yes," the Englishman answered.

"Well, what do you think about it? Can't you handle him?"

"You can bet on that!" the bully replied, confidently. "He ain't built worth a cent; I kin jes' scrunch 'im all to pieces hif I gets my two 'ands on 'im!"

"Of course you kin!" exclaimed Bowers, in his light and airy way. "He's as good as dead a ready. I speak for the first coach in the funeral."

The Clear-grit Sharp cast a quick glance from under his bushy eyebrows at the face of the veteran bummer. The idea had come into the head of the quiet Mr. Brown that the fat and ragged vagabond was speaking sarcastically, but Mr. Bowers bore the scrutiny with a look of candid innocence.

"Yes, sir-ee!" exclaimed the bummer, impressively; "I am jest willing to bet all the money that I kin borrow of any confiding friend that me noble dook hyer will jest flax this long-haired galoot endways!"

Ball smiled in recognition of the compliment, and immediately suggested that talking was dry work, and that they had all better take a drink.

"Look out that you don't get too much on board," continued the cool Mr. Brown. "I don't know anything about this Cherokee's sparring abilities, but he's jest old lightning on the shoot."

"Oh! it's like water to me!" exclaimed the Englishman, referring to the extremely strong "poison" dispensed over the bar of the Occidental by the urbane Lilly King. "In course, the cove don't know 'ow to use 'is 'ands; 'ow could 'e? It takes us hold-countrymen with the bunch of fives."

"Right ag'in for a heap of ducats!" ejaculated Mr. Bowers, as he "hated in his prison."

"Take care!" cautioned the Clear-grit Sharp; "it's the dark horse that some times wins the trick. This Cherokee is as quick as a panther, and he may be built stouter than he looks. I've seen a little man whip a big one a heap of times."

"Jest you let me alone!" retorted Ball; "I've fought ag'in' good men, although I do say it, him the hold country, and I ain't forgot what was beat hinto me when I was a Brumagen lad. I served many a long year hat the anvil and I never was worsted, and there be tough chaps around Birmingham."

"He kin do it for money," cried Bowers, impressively. "Jest look at that arm, like Mars to threaten and command. I go my pile that the other cuss can't stand bat one blow."

"Let me smash him in his face once and he'll think that an 'orse 'as kicked 'im," the bruiser remarked, with due complacency.

"How are you going ahead?" Brown asked.

"Wait till 'e gets hinside, then pick a quarrel with 'im," Ball explained.

"Go slow, or it may be shooting-irons instead of fists," Brown again cautioned.

And then the army again approached the bar and drank to the success of their enterprise.

Cherokee had been considerably astonished by the mysterious warning, so deftly conveyed to him by the acute and sagacious bummer.

"It is my man then, for sure," he muttered, as he looked through the open doorway at the Clear-grit Sharp and his redoubtable army. "This man is cat-like in his nature and defies death. I thought that I recognized him when he entered the room, yet I could hardly believe that the grave had given up its dead. Well, the next time I may be more successful. I wonder if this greasy fellow recognized me? I have changed since the old time, but it is probable that he does know me or else he would not have taken the trouble to put me upon my guard."

And as Cherokee was standing in the shadow thus communing with himself, he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. Turning, he beheld the strange Indian.

The savage had followed Joe Bowers from the room, and, remaining motionless in the shadow of the house, had escaped Cherokee's notice.

"Well?" said the white, in a tone of question.

"White brother's head come back yet?" asked the Indian, slowly.

Cherokee understood the meaning of the question, and slowly shook his head.

"Big chief is sorry; s'pose white brother had come to lodges of the Blackfeet—alone—poor—hungry; what you s'pose Injun do? Give white brother yellow dust—tell him go buy of 'nother brave. No, O-wa-he would have taken his brother to his heart; fed 'um in his own lodge, give 'um own blanket. The Country of the Blackfoot chief is as long as the great muddy river of the north; not short like white brother—not like water that comes from prairie, runs two—three foot, then dies in sand. When the white brother with his squaw left the valley of the Wisdom and marched to setting sun, Mud-turtle staid no longer with the white men. He went back to his tribe. Many moons came and died. The heart of the red chief was lonely—he cared not for his red brothers—he thought all the time of the brother whose skin was white. He left his people and followed on the trail. He went to white lodges—he no find white brother, he go more. He come 'cross great mountains, he find brother at last. His feet are sore—his heart sad; white brother forget Wisdom valley?"

With a face like marble, Cherokee had listened to the plaintive speech of the untutored red-man. Whatever emotions the words of the Indian might have excited within the breast of the white, his face betrayed them not.

"The chief is sure?" Cherokee said, slowly.

"Did his brother ever hear Mud-turtle lie to 'um?" replied the savage, with stately dignity.

"Let the chief in the morning, when the sun first comes up, walk up the bank of the river. His white brother will talk with him there."

"It is good," the savage replied. "Now let the white man open his ears. Snakes are in his path; when he tries to step on them, maybe they bite."

"You mean the men who are drinking at the bar yonder?" Cherokee said, indicating the Clear-grit Sharp and his followers.

"That 'um," replied the Indian, tersely.

"I have already been warned, and I am prepared for them."

"Maybe Mud-turtle take hand in game too," the noble son of the wilderness said, laconically. "Four aces maybe!"

"In the morning, up the river."

"Chief come!"

Then Cherokee re-entered the saloon and passing through it came into the Gentlemen's Parlor, and sitting down at one of the tables ordered a Welsh rarebit to be brought him.

The army had watched his movements with eager eyes.

"Now's your time!" exclaimed Brown.

"How shall I get at him?" Ball asked.

"Sit down at the same table; he's ordered something, and when it comes, claim that you ordered it. If he objects, as he naturally will, tell him that you'll fight him for it!"

"That's the cheese!" cried Bowers, highly delighted.

Ball at once proceeded to put this plan in execution. Swaggering into the apartment he sat down, facing Cherokee, at the same table.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WELSH RAREBIT.

This proceeding upon the part of the burly Englishman did not excite any particular attention, as Cherokee never seemed to notice it in the least.

He sat quietly drumming with his fingers on the table, as perfectly unconcerned as if he had not observed the menacing bravado of the bully.

Carelessly, one by one, the Clear-grit Sharp and his army filed into the room and took seats convenient to the locality occupied by the long-haired Cherokee and the crop-headed Jack Ball.

Cherokee noted the disposition of the attacking forces, for in that light he clearly regarded the new-comer, but never ceased for a moment his restless drumming upon the table. Possibly he felt himself able to cope single-handed with them all.

Then, too, the citizens of Cinnabar did not permit any deliberate murders to be committed within the limits of their town with impunity. They gave particularly short shrift and a particularly long rope to the red-handed murderer. True, if two gentlemen quarreled, and gave each other fair warning that there would be "shooting on sight," then, if a bloody affray took place between the two, and one man was so unfortunate as to kill the other, or even—as it generally happened—some innocent bystander was hurt, it was a fair fight, or a painful accident, according to the *status* of the man injured—and after a sort of a trial, the guilty party was adjudged free from blame.

It was the knowledge of this state of things that caused Ball to refrain from an open and unprovoked attack upon Cherokee. He knew that his own life would answer for that of his victim, unless he could show good cause for quarrel.

In due course of time the servant, a yellow Chinaman, returned with the Welsh rarebit and placed the smoking dish before Cherokee.

"How much?" demanded Ball before Cherokee could open his mouth.

The Chinaman, perfectly unsuspecting, and thinking that, as it sometimes happened, one man was going to treat another, replied in the manner peculiar to the almond-eyed sons of the East:

"Six bittee."

Ball dove his hand down into his pocket as if he intended to fish up the cash, when Cherokee, in the most gentle manner in the world, reached across the narrow table and laid his white hand upon the brawny arm of the other.

"Really I cannot permit this," he said. "I appreciate the favor, but I cannot allow it. You are a perfect stranger to me, you know, and I cannot allow you to pay for my refreshments."

"Who the blazes his a-goin' to pay for you?" growled Ball, in angry tones, and his loud voice instantly attracted the attention of every one in the room to the table occupied by the two.

"Why, you, of course, if you insist upon settling for this delicate morsel," Cherokee said, with a most charming smile.

And Cherokee was so excellent an actor that Ball really began to fear that he should not succeed in provoking the smiling and gentle-voiced sport into a quarrel.

"What 'ave you got to do with it?" growled the bully, scowling fiercely at the unruffled Cherokee.

"Why, I ordered this article, I believe," the

long-haired gentleman replied, calm, mild and smiling.

"Well, I believe you didn't!" cried Ball, fiercely. "See hyer, didn't I horder this 'ere?" and he shook his brawny fist in the face of the astonished Chinaman as he spoke.

"John" never stopped to answer; he thought that the "Melican man" meditated an assault, and inconspicuously fled to the sacred precincts of the kitchen.

"The 'eathen knows I hordered it!" cried Ball, fiercely, glancing around him as if to find some object upon which to vent his anger.

Candy and MacAlpine—in fact, the whole party at their table—were astonished at the forbearance of Cherokee. They could not find it possible to believe that the brawny Englishman had frightened the cool and lion-hearted sport, who, as yet, had never shown the slightest sign of the white feather.

"I say I hordered it, and hit's mine!" cried Ball, and he put his hand across the table and drew the dish deliberately over to him, and, much to the astonishment of all within the room, Cherokee did not interfere to prevent the outrage.

"I really beg your pardon, sir," exclaimed Sandy Rocks, nettled at the bravado of the bully, and, for the moment, generously forgetting the rankling feeling of envy that burned within his heart at the long-bearded Cherokee; "I really beg your pardon, sir," Sandy repeated. "I am aware that it is no affair of mine, but I heard that gentleman," and he pointed to Cherokee, "order that Welsh rabbit."

"I don't want to 'ave no quarrel with nobody," Ball replied, doggedly, "and as long as it ain't no affair of your'n, I don't see as 'ow you 'ave got hany call to hinterfere. Hif this 'ere man don't care for to dispute my claim, I don't see why hanybody else should."

"That's quite correct," Brown observed, apparently addressing the man next to him, but speaking loud enough to be heard all over the room.

But the blood of Sandy Rocks was up, and he had determined that the bully should not crow over the apparent cowardice of Cherokee.

"I reckon that this is a free country and that a man can speak his mind!" Sandy exclaimed, defiantly.

"I don't want to poke my spoon in anybody's soup, but I know who owns that Welsh rabbit, and I ain't afeard to say it, too! and if any man in this room, big or little, says I don't know, why I kin make him eat that rabbit, that's all!"

Mr. Ball did not reply to this defiant speech. He did not care to be embroiled in a quarrel with the stalwart Sandy.

"I am really very much obliged to you, Mr. Rocks, for your interference upon my behalf in this matter," Cherokee said, as cool and easy as if nothing at all had happened. But I think I can attend to this matter and settle it quite satisfactorily, to myself, if not to this gentleman," and then the speaker bowed, in the most courteous manner possible, to Ball, who, for the first time, began to have a suspicion that there was some trick in all this smooth talk.

"If you will have the kindness to permit me to examine that Welsh rabbit, I think that I shall be able to convince all, within at least five minutes, as to the ownership of the article."

Then the smiling and courteous Cherokee reached his hand across the table, and drew the dish back again to his side of the table.

Ball, utterly bewildered by the quiet manner of the man whom he had so wantonly insulted, permitted the dish to be removed.

All within the room looked on with intense curiosity.

Cherokee took a fork and turned the "rabbit" over carefully.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, in an abstracted sort of way, as if he was speaking entirely to himself; "John certainly does understand how to cook a rabbit after the true fashion; no vulgar cheese and toast rudely thrown together, but eggs, delicately cooked, a *la* omelette, and the cheese in dice; with a little Worcestershire sauce—a feast fit for the gods!"

Then he proceeded to examine the dish closely.

"I see, sir, the morsel is yours; if you will have the kindness to look closely—"

And, suspecting no evil Ball bent over the table, amazed. Then, in a twinkling, Cherokee grabbed him by the throat with a grasp of iron, and as the mouth of the bully was forced open, with his other hand Cherokee stuffed the hot rabbit into it.

"If it's yours, eat it, hang you!" cried Cherokee, and then releasing Ball as suddenly as he had grabbed him, he caught up the plate and broke it over the bully's head, felling him instantly to the floor.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CHALLENGE.

To say that the sudden and unexpected action of the long-haired Cherokee rather astonished the inmates of the gentlemen's parlor would be but to mildly state the truth; and no one in the room was more amazed than the English bully, into whose mouth the dainty Welsh rabbit had been so unceremoniously thrust.

Down went Ball to the floor, the plate, with which Cherokee had struck him, breaking into a dozen pieces, and then there was a sudden commotion in the room.

The Clear-grit Sharp and his party jumped to their feet, and commenced to handle their weapons; whereupon Sandy Rocks, Bob Candy, and the rest congregated at their table, at once produced their "shooting-irons," while Cherokee, coolly reclining upon a corner of the table, with both hands thrust in the pockets of the loose sack-coat that he wore, seemed utterly incapable of a hostile act; but each hand of the dark-haired sport grasped a cocked "Derringer," snugly hid within the pocket of his coat, and he knew that two lives at least would be at his mercy before another soul in the room could raise the hammer of a weapon.

Just for a moment it seemed as if there was a fine prospect for a general fight; but when the Clear-grit Sharp perceived that others were as quick as he, to use the popular expression, he "hailed in his horns."

Cherokee noticed the hesitation, and a smile of contempt curled the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, sail in, gentlemen!" he exclaimed; "I'm

ready for business; I'm your mutton, and with the wool on, too!"

The bold defiance nettled Brown, for he understood that the challenge was addressed directly to him.

"I reckon that I've no call to ante up just now," the Clear-grit Sharp said, "but I hate to see a man taken at a disadvantage."

"And who began the fuss?" demanded Sandy Rocks, fiercely. The miner had got it into his head that there was a set plan to "double-bank" the cool and calculating Cherokee, and though there was a rankling feeling of envy in the heart of the sandy-bearded miner toward the long-haired gentleman who had so effectually "downed" the burly Englishman, yet the large-hearted Sandy was not the man to stand tamely by and see three or four set upon one.

Before any one of the party headed by the scar-cheeked Mr. Brown could reply to the indignant miner's question, Ball scrambled to his feet again.

One of the fragments of the plate had cut a slight gash in Ball's temple, and the blood, streaming down over the face of the Englishman, did not at all tend to improve his looks.

"Why didn't you give a cove a chance?" Ball demanded, indignantly, spitting out the remains of the Welsh rabbit from his mouth as he spoke. "I'm a better man nor you, you blarsted Yankee!" and Ball shook his fist furiously in the face of the cool and collected Cherokee.

And for answer, Cherokee quietly disengaged his right hand from the pocket of the sack-coat and struck the unprepared bully a sudden blow in the face that felled him as if he had been shot.

It was evident now that the quiet gentleman with the long hair did not intend to submit to any abuse.

At Ball's sudden and ignominious downfall, the Clear-grit Sharp and his party again showed hostile signs, but the opposite faction, Candy, Rocks, etc., were prepared for action, and Brown hesitated to commence the contest, which would most surely have been a bloody one.

"Why don't he give the man a chance?" cried Brown, trying to appear as a disinterested "looker-on in Vienna." "Let the man have a fair show!"

"That's the talk!" cried Joe Bowers, who found it impossible to longer restrain his natural disposition to interfere. "Let 'em fight it out like men and warriors. I'll hold the bottle and the stakes if the gentlemen care to pony up."

"And who'll hold you?" asked Sandy Rocks, sarcastically.

"That ain't orig'nal with you, pard," observed Bowers, with great dignity. "I've heard that afore, but everybody knows ole Joe Bowers. Thar ain't a jail in California that can't testify that I'm O. K.—jes' the man to tie to."

By this time Ball was on his feet again, and not materially damaged, either, for the stroke had been a comparatively light one, and if Ball had been braced, prepared to receive it, it would not have shaken him in the least.

The Englishman, veteran bruiser as he was, was somewhat astonished at the quickness of the man with whom he had picked so wanton a quarrel, but he did not believe that Cherokee possessed the stamina to stand up against him in a fair struggle, so he boldly challenged him to battle.

"You can 'it a cove when 'e ain't a-looking," Ball growled, sulkily; "but I dare you to come houtside with me and settle it like a man."

"That's the way to talk!" Brown cried, egging the quarrel on.

"Respected friend with the short hair!" Cherokee exclaimed, in his pleasant way, "I'm just the man you're looking for. I'm your meat at anything from a toothpick up to a jackass battery."

"I halways fight with nature's weapons, I do!" cried the bully. "If you ain't afeard to 'ave ago with me with your fists, jest you come houtside, and I'll spile that face of your'n inside of ten minutes."

The ferocious tone in which Ball uttered the threat left no doubt that he would try his best to be as good as his word.

"Oh, thar'll be a rise in court-plaster!" Bowers ejaculated. "I wish I was a 'poticary shop!"

"Well, I reckon that I will have to accommodate you, stranger, seeing that you won't be happy unless I do," Cherokee said, carelessly. "Gents, will you come along and see the fun?" He addressed the remark to Sandy Rocks and his party.

"You bet!" replied the miner, tersely.

"Go ahead, then, my gentle friend!" Cherokee exclaimed.

"Come hon," Ball said, in his blustering way, "and, mebbe, arter I get through with you, you'll think twice next time afore you grab a gent'l man by the throat."

"Stranger, you claimed that rabbit, and I made up my mind that you should have it."

Ball did not reply, but led the way from the room. After him came the Clear-grit Sharp and his followers; Cherokee, with Sandy Rocks and his party, made up the rear.

As the throng filed through the bar-room, the bleeding face of the Englishman attracted general remark.

The redoubtable man-from-Red-Dog, with a small and chosen party of his friends, were celebrating at the bar of the saloon.

Dandy Jim's curiosity was excited at once, and he eagerly inquired the meaning of the scene. When it was explained to the red-shirted giant that the apparently slightly-built Cherokee was going to contend in a fist-cuff match with the brawny Englishman, his astonishment and indignation knew no bounds. The man-from-Red-Dog had waylaid Joe Bowers and received from him a highly-seasoned account of the whole disturbance.

"Wanted to take his hash, did he?" cried the man-from-Red-Dog, in rising wrath. "Wa-al, I'd like to know what in thunder we air comin' to in this hyer free and enlightened country! Wanted to take the man's hash from right under his nose, did he?—the big mule-headed son of a John-donkey!"

It was evident that the man-from-Red-Dog was becoming greatly excited.

"An Englishman, too!" continued Dandy Jim, addressing the admiring crowd that had collected around him. "Feller-citizens, was it for this hyer that our forefathers fit and died and wallowed in blood and mud?—by the everlasting thunder! this hyer is the roughest deal that I ever heard tell of since the big fire in Red Dog, when the whiskey

out and we went it alone fur a week on nasty water. Wanted to take a free American's hash! Feller-citizens, I reckon I'm goin' to wade into this hyer affair myself!"

And then out rushed the Red-Dogite, followed by the crowd.

CHAPTER XL.

BEHIND THE JAIL.

THE moon was shining quite brightly when the little crowd that accompanied the combatants stepped from the hotel into the open air.

Ball hesitated for a moment as if uncertain in what direction to bend his steps.

"There's a nice, quiet place just back of the jail," a bystander suggested.

"Just the spot!" cried Clint MacAlpine, the postmaster.

Two or three more of the crowd expressed the belief that in all California two gentlemen disposed for a quiet discussion couldn't find a more appropriate place than the little open space just back of the calaboose. So Ball bent his steps that way and the crowd followed.

But when all had gathered at the back of the jail and begun to discuss the preliminaries of the contest there was a sudden interruption to the proceedings.

Out from the jail sallied the keeper, with two big revolvers, loaded and cocked, in his hands, demanding to know what in blazes the crowd meant by coming and raising a riot at the back of the calaboose. But when he learned that it was merely two gentlemen going to settle a private quarrel, he apologized like the noble white man that he was, and, laying aside his weapons, proposed to the crowd that, if they had no objection, he'd like to bring a few fellows out from the jail to enjoy the fun.

As the jailer said, with deep sympathy expressed both in his voice and face, "it was rough on the poor galoots awaiting their trial that they couldn't enjoy themselves once in a while," and the confiding jailer further informed the crowd that if they wanted any "points" regarding a fistcuff match, he had no doubt his prisoners would be able to "post 'em," as, just then, he had the biggest set of scamps in the jail that could be found unhung in all "North-ern California."

But the scamps were men of honor; and having given the jailer their words as gentlemen they would not attempt to escape, there was a general calaboose delivery to witness the coming contest.

"It's to be a fair fight, you know," said Ball, as he commenced to disrobe—"no bitin' or scratchin' or goughin', 'cos I don't understand that 'ere work."

"That is all right," Cherokee assented; "you shall have as fair a contest as you could possibly wish."

And just at this point there was another and a violent interruption to the proceedings.

Up rushed the man-from-Red-Dog, followed by a small crowd of his friends.

"See hyer, this b'lin' is all a mistake!" the Red-Dogite exclaimed, patting Cherokee on the shoulder. "You are a good little man, you sport with the long hair, but I'm the man-from-Red-Dog, and I don't allow no two-legged critter to fight my battles. That was my hash that you took, you mule-mouthed, antelope-headed son of a rattlesnake! I'm your man! whoop!" and then the excited son of Red Dog's famous town made a rush at the Englishman with intent to annihilate him upon the spot, and it is extremely probable that Ball would have suffered had not half a dozen of the crowd grabbed hold of the man-from-Red-Dog and held him by main force.

"Hold on!" yelled Dandy Jim, in a rage. "When I say hold on, I mean let go! What're you 'bout? That was my rabbit! I kin wallop this Britisher if he says it wasn't!"

But despite Dandy Jim's remonstrance, the crowd kept tight hold of him.

"Ave I got to fight the 'ole town?" exclaimed Ball, in disgust.

"It was my hash, gent'l'men!" yelled the man-from-Red-Dog, vociferously. "I'll bet ten dollars to a smack in the face that it was my rabbit! Gent'l'men, what is this hyer free country comin' to if a man can't fight when he wants to?" demanded Dandy Jim, indignantly.

"Oh, take a rest!" suggested Mr. Bowers.

But this suggestion only seemed to irritate the man-from-Red-Dog the more, and he glared around into the faces of the crowd, eager to discover who it was that had ventured the remark. With true modesty, however, the bummer was careful to keep in the background.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir," Cherokee said, in his quiet way, "but as this quarrel is mine, perhaps you will have the goodness to allow me to settle it."

"Wa-al, durn my old cat's boots!" ejaculated the man-from-Red-Dog, in disgust; "what is this hyer country comin' to when one man ain't willing that another one should fight for him! I swar I'm jest a-going to leave this hyer blamed United States—I'll quit and go to Oregon!"

The crowd laughed, and perceiving that the man-from-Red-Dog had given up his idea of interfering in the quarrel, they released him, and, growling to himself, Dandy Jim took up a place in the ring that surrounded the two men.

Ball had thrown off his loose jacket and faced Cherokee, his brawny bosom covered with a dirty blue flannel shirt.

The long-haired sport had simply removed his coat—he wore no vest—and tightened his pantaloons around his hips.

When the two men faced each other, there wasn't such a difference between their sizes as one would have imagined.

Cherokee overtopped the short Englishman by half a head at least, and though not so brawny in build, yet, when the bared arms of the two were compared, it was plainly to be seen that the Englishman had little muscular advantage to boast of.

There was no pretense of shaking hands between the two, but Ball advanced directly upon the nimble-footed Cherokee, evidently intending to bear the other down by superior weight.

For the first minute or two Ball sparred cautiously, evidently trying to take the measure of his active foe, and then, provoked that he could not find an opening, he made a blind, desperate rush at his antagonist, willfully laying himself open, and trusting to a "counter" to give a heavier blow than he could receive.

But the skillful Cherokee was by far the abler man of the two, and, as the Englishman rushed in, he received him with three or four heavy blows in the face that went straight as a die to their mark.

Bewildered and enraged by the stinging smacks, Ball rushed blindly after his nimble-footed antagonist.

Never once "losing his head," and sparring as coolly as though he were in the boxing-school with the padded gloves upon his hands, Cherokee planted blow after blow upon the fat and puffy face of the bruiser, and the purple blood followed each whip-like crack.

Winded at last, Ball paused, and from sheer fatigue, dropped his guard for a moment, and then, taking advantage of this, the wily Cherokee, fresh as when he had begun the struggle, measured the distance that separated him from Ball, and with a most tremendous right-hander, delivered straight-armed full at the brawny throat of the Englishman, took him off his legs as though Ball had been felled by a cannon-ball.

Over on his back went the Englishman with a force that made the ground shake, and his head, falling back, struck the earth with a dull thud that could be plainly heard a hundred feet away.

"Oh!" cried the crowd, taking a long breath, as if with a feeling of relief.

The Englishman never stirred after he struck the ground, and the "army" sprung forward to assist him.

"Knocked out of time in the first round!" said Clint MacAlpine.

"As purty a lick as I ever see'd!" exclaimed the man-from-Red-Dog, in a tone of admiration.

Cherokee stood with folded arms, low down about his waist—the favorite breathing-rest of the sparrer—waiting for his foe to revive. Even the long-bearded sport was astonished at the result of his blow, for he had no idea that he had hit the man so hard.

"He's fainted," suggested one of the crowd.

"More than that; the man is dead," Brown said, coldly.

CHAPTER XLI.

PATRICE IS CURIOUS.

JAMES YORKER, proprietor of the Occidental, sat in his bed-chamber. The face of the burly landlord, deadly pale, showed evident signs of suffering.

"Oh, what a fool I was ever to return to this place!" he muttered, and he passed his hand restlessly over his burning forehead. "I might have known that there was danger, and yet, who would have supposed, after the Indian war and the scenes of blood which wiped out the settlements in the valley, that an avenger should still live to call me to account for the terrible tragedy of the Cinnabar mine. I must make arrangements to get away from this place as soon as possible. I shall have to accept Clint MacAlpine's offer," he continued, musingly, as he referred to a letter that he held in his hand, "and yet it is not within five hundred dollars of what the place is worth. But money will be of little value if I lose my life, and so I had better get out while I have a whole skin. A cold shiver runs over me every time I think of that white rider. It was almost a miracle that he spared my life in the canyon. If it had not been for Patrice's appearance I do not think I should have escaped."

And as the innkeeper meditated upon the fair young girl who had come to seek a new home on the far Pacific slope, he heard a low tap at the door which led from his room into the apartment occupied by his niece.

"Is that you, Patrice?" he asked.

"Yes, uncle," the girl replied. "Have you gone to bed yet?"

"No, not yet."

"May I come in?"

"Certainly."

The door opened and Patrice entered the room.

"Well, puss, you're up late to-night," Yorker said.

"Yes, uncle; I've been listening to the men in the street."

"Did the drunken fellows keep you awake?"

"Oh, no; I've been thinking."

"About what?"

"Why, what a strange sort of country this is, and how many strange people there are in it, and Mrs. MacAlpine has been paying a visit—quite a long one, too."

Both the postmaster and his wife resided at the hotel.

"She's a very nice woman."

"Yes, and she seems to know all about everybody in this place."

"Leave a woman alone to find out everything worth knowing, particularly when her husband happens to be in office."

"She has been telling me so many strange things," the girl said, thoughtfully. "Oh, uncle, did you ever hear of the family that live in a place called the wend-dam shanty?"

"Oh, yes; that's old Ugly and his daughter."

"Did you ever see the daughter?" Patrice continued, with eager curiosity.

"Yes, I believe I did once," the landlord replied, endeavoring to remember. "I think that once as a party of us were riding past the shanty, we caught sight of the girl."

"Is she pretty?" Patrice asked, abruptly.

"Well, I really don't remember," Yorker answered, wondering at the question.

"Mrs. MacAlpine said that she is very pretty indeed, and that she is such a ladylike girl."

"It may be," the landlord assented. "Old Ugly's a gentleman when he isn't disguised in liquor, but he is generally in that condition when he comes to town. I saw him down-stairs, playing cards, just before I came up, and he was so much intoxicated that he could hardly tell one card from another."

"Isn't it a shame?" cried Patrice, indignantly.

"Yes, I kinder pity the old man sometimes," the landlord confessed. "It's very evident to me that he's seen the time when he was pretty high up in the world, but liquor and card-playing will pull the best man down."

"Why don't you turn him out of the hotel when he comes in drunk, uncle?" the girl asked.

"Oh, I can't do that, dear, unless he makes a disturbance, and that he never does. Even if I refused to sell him liquor, he'd go off and get it somewhere else."

"Mrs. MacAlpine has been telling me a lot of gossip," the girl persisted.

"Yes, I'll back her to know all that's going on in the town!"

"Of course you know the gentleman they call Cherokee?"

"Oh, yes; a nice, civil fellow he is, too."

"He's a gambler, isn't he?"

"Well, yes, my dear, I suppose he is," Yorker replied, slowly. "I don't know that he has any other business but card-playing; but for a man of that class he is very much of a gentleman."

"He and this old Mr. Ugly are great friends, I believe?"

"They are together a good deal, but Cherokee don't care to win the old man's money; he flies after bigger game."

"Mrs. MacAlpine told me that Cherokee had bought a share in the mine that belongs to the old man, and that he had given ten times as much as it was worth," the girl continued.

"Yes, I heard something about that. The fact is, I guess he wants to help the old man along. I've seen Cherokee try to keep the old man from drinking and gambling a dozen times at least."

"And does the old man stop?"

"Not a bit!" answered Yorker, emphatically; "and he never will stop until he quits this life. When a man as old as Ugly goes it as strong as he does, there's no stopping him this side of the grave."

"And why does Cherokee help the old man—what is the reason?"

Yorker had come to the conclusion that his niece was getting strangely curious, and he rather wondered at it; but he answered the question as well as he could.

"That is a pretty hard thing to discover," he replied. "I suppose that he just pities the old man, that's all. I don't know of any other reason."

"Mrs. MacAlpine knows of another reason," the girl said, shrewdly.

"As I said before, that woman knows everything that's going on in this hyer town!" the landlord exclaimed. "Well, what reason does she give?"

"She says that Cherokee is in love with old Ugly's daughter."

A low whistle of astonishment came from the lips of the landlord of the Occidental.

"Well, by George!" he exclaimed; "that never struck me!"

"Do you think it probable?" and Patrice looked quite anxious as she put the question.

"No, I shouldn't think it probable. In the first place, from what I've seen of Cherokee, I should say that he ain't the kind of man to run after women much. Now, if she had said that Sandy Rocks was after the girl, she would have hit it."

"Sandy Rocks!" cried Patrice in astonishment.

"Yes; he's a miner, boards hyer with us," Yorker explained. "Haven't you noticed a big man with long yellow hair, and a huge sandy beard, and blue eyes, at the table?"

The girl nodded.

"Well, that's Sandy—nice fellow, too; for a time he used to talk just wild about old Ugly's daughter. That was when she first came. I haven't heard much lately."

"You don't believe Mrs. MacAlpine is correct, then, in her report about Mr. Cherokee?"

"No, I reckon not; or at least, I never heerd anything about it."

"I guess I'll go to bed now," said the girl, suddenly; "good-night."

She kissed her uncle and retired.

Yorker sat in meditation for a few minutes, and then, when he raised his eyes, oh, horror! the mystic white rider, the terrible Death Shot of Shasta, stood before him, his dark eyes gleaming through his mask.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WARNING.

YORKER's breath came thick and hard as he gazed upon the white-robed figure.

The Death Shot had closed the door behind him, and stood facing the affrighted inn-keeper, his dark eyes gleaming like coals of fire through the holes in the white hood.

A cold perspiration stood upon the forehead of the landlord. He expected that his hour of doom had come.

"Jimmy Hughes, you are still in Cinnabar!" the white rider said, in a voice full of menace.

"Yes, yes," muttered the landlord, his face white with fear.

"Just three days, Jimmy Hughes, I give you, and after that time, if you are found within the limits of this town, call to Heaven to have mercy upon your soul."

Low, hoarse and strange was the voice of the mysterious mask.

"Why do you wish to drive me away?" gasped Yorker, shaking under the influence of a mortal terror.

"Is your memory so treacherous that you have forgotten the scenes of blood that marked the destruction of the Cinnabar mine property?" the masked man questioned, sternly.

"I remember it only too well," the landlord said, mournfully; "but, why in heaven's name should you hold me to a reckoning in that bloody affair? I never lifted a finger against either Talbot or Brown. On the contrary, I did all in my power to save them from the mad anger of the mob."

"You did not lift a finger against the men of the Cinnabar mine?" the white rider said, slowly and in a tone of question.

"As Heaven is my judge, I did not!" the landlord exclaimed.

"But who was it that counseled the defenders of the Cinnabar stockade to surrender, and pledged his word for their safety?" asked the Death Shot, hoarsely.

Yorker sunk down in the chair from which he had arisen; his legs refused to support him.

"That's the question, James Hughes, or James Yorker, as you now call yourself, that I want you to answer."

The landlord hesitated for a few moments, but at last, in sheer desperation, spoke:

"I did; I pledged my word that neither Talbot or Brown should be harmed."

"And you kept that promise, too, eh?" the white rider questioned, his voice full of angry menace.

"What could I do against a host of enraged men?" Yorker cried, desperately. "I could not have stopped the mob even if I sacrificed my own life."

"And you tried so hard to stop the red-handed murderers!" the Death Shot exclaimed, in contempt. "You coolly said that you washed your hands of the whole business, and walked away. The death of Brown does not lie at your door; oh, no! You did not put the rope around his neck; you did not give the signal which launched his pure soul into eternity, and stilled forever the beatings of the noblest heart that ever throbbed within the breast of mortal man. Oh, no, your hands are clear of blood. You did not even receive thirty pieces of silver for the men who surrendered, trusting to your word, and whom you basely betrayed—delivered, bound hand and foot, into the power of the blood-craving butchers. An army could not have taken the superintendent and foreman of the Cinnabar Company from the tunnel of the mine. They would have died within the rocky recess, but they would have had the ghosts of a hundred foes to escort their spirits to the land of shadows. Samson-like, they would have fallen amid a host of dying men."

Pale and agitated, Yorker listened to the angry words of the strangely-disguised man. He knew that defense he had none. He had acted like a coward and traitor, but he feared to pay the debt he had incurred.

"Mercy!" he gasped, convulsively.

"Mercy!" cried the white rider, in contemptuous scorn. "What a hollow mockery is in that word when around me rise the blood-stained specters of the Cinnabar fight?"

"Spare my life and I will go away," Yorker pleaded. "I know that I acted like a weak coward, but I had no idea at the time that matters would be pushed so far. I did not for a single instant imagine that any extreme measures would be taken by the mob. I was terribly deceived."

"Yes, by that arch villain, Congleton, aided by the gambler, Kentuck. Those two men elected you mayor of the city and in return you served them to the utmost of your power. They did get the Cinnabar lode into their hands, but only when the works were a heap of ruins, sprinkled with blood. And in the end what did they gain by their triumph? Congleton, hunted down like a wild beast, perished like a miserable reptile, calling aloud upon the cold stars that looked down upon him for release from his torture. What was all the gold in the world, mined, or in the bosom of the solid rock, to the Frisco sharp in that dark hour? And for the lesser scoundrel, Kentuck, he was stricken down even in the very moment of his triumph. The chalice of victory was even at his lips, when a rude, red hand dashed it down to earth, and instead of gloating upon the death-pangs of his foe, as he had anticipated, he himself was fanned by the dark wings of the destroyer."

"Mercy!" again cried the panic-stricken landlord, now fully convinced that his last hour was nigh; "mercy, if not for myself, for the sake of the poor child in yonder room—my niece, Patrice; I am all that she has in the world. She has never injured anyone. If you strike me, you strike her."

"Has she not a fortune from her mother?" the Death Shot asked, slowly.

"No; she is both penniless and friendless," the landlord replied. "Her mother, Bernice, died when she was quite young, and her father, my younger brother, dabbled in unwise speculations, and died a beggar. Her mother was the last of the Gwyne family. Patrice has neither kith nor kin living on the mother's side."

"Penniless and depending upon you?" the white rider repeated.

"As there is a heaven above, I swear to you that I speak the truth," exclaimed Yorker, earnestly. "I ask for mercy, then, if not for myself, for the sake of this innocent child who will suffer without my care."

And hardly had Yorker finished his supplicating speech, when the low, sweet voice of the young girl sounded upon the air of the night, chanting the words of a hymn.

Soft and musical the simple words of praise rose upon the air, and, for a few seconds, the terrible masked rider listened to the fresh young voice like a man in a trance.

When the verse ended, the Death Shot spoke abruptly, and his voice sounded strangely indeed:

"Hughes, for the sake of this girl, I will spare your life, but leave Cinnabar valley; leave it, and never return. Take her with you, too, else harm may come to her, for within twenty days there will be bloody work in this hyer town. Ten days longer you can stay, but no longer than that."

"I will go in three if I can only arrange my affairs," Yorker said, quickly.

"And keep silent regarding this interview," the white rider cautioned. "Breathe not to a single soul that you have received a visit from me. Remember, ten days more only. If you tarry hyer after that time, no power on earth can save you."

After uttering this threat, the mysterious being quitted the room as suddenly as he had entered it, and, so light was his step, that he trod as noiselessly as an Indian warrior upon the war-path.

A long breath came from the lips of the landlord of the Occidental when the door closed after his visitor. In truth, a great weight was lifted from off his mind.

"There is no fear of my being found in the valley after ten days," he muttered. "I'll close with Clint MacAlpine to-morrow. He can take the hotel at his offer. I shan't breathe freely until I am out of this accursed place. I was a fool to ever return to it." And, after this sage remark, the landlord retired to bed, but it was a restless, uneasy slumber that visited him that night.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE MEDICAL MAN.

"Dead?" cried Cherokee, in amazement.

"Dead!" re-echoed the crowd, in wonder, and then, actuated by a common impulse, all of them sprung forward to look at the fallen man.

"Yes, sir-ee, dead!" cried the keeper of the jail, who had been one of the first to examine the prisoner.

The crowd looked at each other, astonished.

"Send for a doctor!" cried the Clear-grit Sharp, kneeling by the side of the unfortunate Englishman.

"Hyar ye are, sport!" exclaimed the jailer, and he beckoned to one of the paroled prisoners. "Say, Doc, just take a squint at this cuss!"

The prisoner addressed as "Doc" was a tall, good-looking fellow, with a thin face and a straggling, grayish, yellow beard.

Doc was pretty well known to the miners of Northern California as being one of the most unprincipled scamps that had ever escaped the rope of the hangman. A citizen of the world, Doc believed in the Agrarian system—the equal distribution of property—and, therefore, helped himself, without any scruples, to anything that he fancied. It was currently reported, and as generally believed, that the slender man of medicine had stolen more horses than any other two rogues unhung in the whole entire North, and being possessed of an unusual amount of dexterity, he generally contrived to get off with very light punishments.

His present sojourn in the precincts of the calaboose was owing to a little adventure that he had with a young "pilgrim," just outside the limits of the town. The Doc, being broke, had kindly volunteered to relieve the innocent youth of the trouble of looking after his valuables, and when the pilgrim had naturally objected to this proceeding, the Doc kindly argued the case with him by means of a seven-shooter, and the result was that in just about a minute the young stranger was fully converted to the Agrarian belief and "shelled" out his plunder with a rapidity that delighted the heart of the "great medicine-man," as the Doc was sometimes termed. But when the youth reached the town, after his brief interview with the leading light of the "new dispensation," he repented of his action, and forthwith set bloodhounds of the law upon the track of the potent professor. And the result of this proceeding was that the Doc, who was enjoying himself with a few congenial spirits at a "shebang," popularly known as the Break o' Day saloon, and reputed to produce more fights to the quart than any other first-class resort in town, was unceremoniously laid by the heels and dragged off to the calaboose. To the credit of the Doc's friends, and not to detract from the reputation of the Break o' Day, it must be stated that the capture was not effected without the tallest kind of a shindy, and that the satellites of the law, upon their return with their prisoner, were able to show as nice an assortment of black eyes and bloody noses as the lively little town of Cinnabar had ever seen.

The doctor, who was in reality a graduate of one of the most celebrated medical colleges in England, and possessed of no mean skill in the healing art, knelt down by the side of the prostrate man and commenced to examine him.

"Now stand back thar, gents!" exclaimed the jailer, rather proud that the services of one of his "flock" had been needed. "Jest gi'n us room."

"The man is dead, sure enough," said Doc.

"Killed by the blow?" asked the Clear-grit Sharp, eagerly.

It was evident that he desired to make capital against Cherokee.

"What of he was?" growled the man-from-Red-Dog, savagely. "It were a fair fight, an' the man who sez it wasn't is a yellow monkey and a hoss-thief!"

"The blow was not sufficient to kill the man," Doc said, decidedly. "It is my impression that he was suffering from heart disease, and that the exertion and excitement of the contest had more to do with his death than anything else. I judge from what I know of the man that he has trained a good deal in his young days, and it is a well-known fact that severe training tends to weaken the system and renders it liable to yield—to snap, as it were—all of a sudden."

"Well, I reckon that something ought to be done about the affair," Brown said, sulkily. "This hyer man is dead, and that man killed him." The Clear-grit Sharp pointed to Cherokee as he spoke.

"It were a fair fight!" yelled Dandy Jim, indignantly. "I'd like to know what this hyer State of California is a-coming to if two gentlemen can't settle a difficulty without having other people putting their jaw in!"

"The man is dead an' he's kilt, so he is!" Shannon exclaimed.

"Caramba, it is no better than murder!" the Mexican cried.

"Thar ought to be a trial, any way!" Yuba declared.

"Oh, fellow-citizens, air we a-goin' to stand tamed by and see a poor gaiot slewed in this hyer barbarous way?" Joe Bowers exclaimed, pathetically.

The "army" were prompt to follow the "lead" of their commander.

"It was an accident!" protested Sandy Rocks.

"Certainly an accident!" the postmaster chimed in.

"Clearly an accident—one that could not be foreseen," Judge Candy exclaimed.

"It was an accident, and the man that says it isn't is a mule-headed gopher, an' I kin flax him clear out of his boots inside of two minutes. Say, some of you fellers over thar, just come and slap me in the face, won't you?" pleaded the man-from-Red-Dog.

Not one of the "army" seemed inclined to accept the invitation of the red-shirted giant.

Cherokee now spoke.

"Gentlemen, I reckon I can always be found if any one wants me bad, and as to this affair, I think that you all understand the quarrel was forced on me."

"He wanted to take his hash!" interrupted Dandy Jim, in a loud voice; "the hash of a free American citizen—"

"Oh, simmer down!" cried a voice, apparently coming from behind the man-from-Red-Dog.

Dandy Jim turned, blazing with indignation, but to his astonishment, discovered that there wasn't anybody in the rear of him. The Red-Dog was no fool, and he understood at once that some one was playing ventriloquist tricks on him.

"If that cuss who kin sling his voice so handy will jest step out and own it, I'll bet him ten dollars that he won't do so no more!" the man-from-Red-Dog remarked.

The humorous gentleman, who was no other than

the original Joe Bowers, did not deem it wise to accept the invitation.

After this interruption, Cherokee went on with his speech.

"As I was going to say, gentlemen, I am willing to accept any responsibility that may attach to my share in this matter. This man forced the quarrel upon me, but if I am not perfectly justified in acting as I have done, I am ready to answer for it. I shan't run away, and, for that matter, I am now ready to surrender myself to any officer that may be present."

All looked at the jailer, but he shook his head.

"Tain't my fry, gentl'men," he admitted; "taint my business to make any arrests."

"I stand ready to go bail for this gent hyer, if any man in the crowd will lend me the money!" and the man-from-Red-Dog stepped forward, proudly.

"I'll take charge of the prisoner until a proper officer comes," the Clear-grit Sharp said, advancing.

"Not much," Cherokee responded, tersely; "I don't surrender to you."

"No, no; of course not," exclaimed Candy and his crowd.

And the end of it was, Cherokee proceeded to the Occidental, where the sheriff, twenty minutes after, arrested him, and as this was only a mere form, bail being immediately given, Cherokee was not for a single instant restrained of his liberty. Of course, he did not stand the slightest danger from the result of the contest.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BROWN'S EXPERIMENT.

In the cave of the Clear-grit lode a gloomy party were assembled.

There were Brown, the chief demon of the gang, Yuba, the gentle William, Velarde, the Mexican, Shannon, the Irishman, and the redoubtable Joseph Bowers.

From the scene of the encounter behind the jail, the "army" and their commander had proceeded directly to their head-quarters.

"Well, boys, we're one less now," observed Brown, looking around upon the faces of his associates.

"Worse luck!" Bowers remarked.

"Mebbe this man can't be killed," the Clear-grit Sharp suggested.

"And why not?" demanded the Mexican. "Caramba, one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one escape make a whole lifetime secure. The Englishman was a bull-head. We know how to manage such affairs better in Mexico."

"Maybe it's striking him in the back, you mane?" Shannon queried. "Shure Bill was after him night and day, and niver got the last taste of a chance."

The lips of the Mexican curled in contempt, as he replied:

"A man must go like a snake, not like a horse."

"Perhaps you think you could accomplish the little job," observed Brown.

"Double the money and I'll do it," Velarde answered, very promptly.

"It is a bargain," the Clear-grit Sharp said, after considering upon the proposal for a moment. "That is, if no one objects," and he looked round upon the gang.

"I'll sell out my share in the thing, cheap," Bowers observed, a grin upon his fat face. "I don't hanker arter any trouble with that cuss."

The look upon the faces of the other two plainly showed that they fully agreed with the bumper.

"Then you can consider the bargain settled," Brown said, addressing the Mexican. "It is understood; double the original amount shall be paid to you if you succeed in the job."

"He is dead and buried!" answered the Mexican, with true Spanish bravado.

"I reckon that he's kinder lively for a man that has been 'planted,'" muttered Bowers, in an undertone.

Evidently he did not believe the long-haired Cherokee in any great peril.

This conclusion reached, the gang separated, Yuba to return to his old quarters in the calaboose, while Velarde, Bowers and Shannon started for the Occidental, leaving the Clear-grit Sharp in possession of the cave. But the three who were together had not proceeded over a hundred feet when Brown called out for the bumper to return, as he wanted to speak to him.

There was a suspicious look upon the fat face of the vagabond as he parted with his comrades and started back to the cave.

In a careless way, Bowers thrust his hand inside his ragged coat, taking advantage of the fact that Brown had turned his back to him. The dark figure of the Clear-grit Sharp could be plainly seen, and a sullen, peculiar look came over the face of the bumper. His hand was still thrust into the breast of his coat, and he cast a rapid glance around as if to ascertain the position of the two men whose company he had just quitted.

They were only a little way off, and their dark figures could be easily discerned.

Bowers shook his head.

"They are too near," he muttered; "'sides, I ain't sure now; I've drank so much whisky that my hand is shaky. I might, and then ag'in I moughtn't. I'd better not risk it. Let him run for awhile. Mebbe this long-haired feller will do my work for me. P'hap' he'll drop onto me!" and his face assumed an anxious look as this thought came into his mind. "But it ain't likely."

By the time the vagabond had arrived at this conclusion, he was at the door of the cave. Entering with the usual beaming smile upon his face, he found Brown seated by the table in the center of the little apartment.

"Sit down," said the sharp, and then he produced a bottle and a couple of tin cups from under the table. "Have a drink?"

It is a fact not to be denied that the veteran, Joe Bowers, had never been known to decline an invitation to imbibe.

"Well, I don't very often indulge, my lord dook!" observed Mr. Bowers, modestly, seating himself as he spoke, "but when I do drink, it is generally about this time," and then he grinned at his own well-worn joke.

"Help yourself," observed Brown, tersely, passing the bottle over to Bowers.

"Few words, but a heap of sense," Bowers remarked, as he obeyed the injunction.

"Luck!" said Brown, laconically, draining his cup.

"Gobs of it!" was Mr. Bowers's polite response.

"I wanted to have a leetle talk with you; you're a man of sense," Brown began.

"I hev seen a thing or two," Bowers replied, with becoming modesty.

"Take another horn!" The host shoved the bottle over, and the bumper proceeded with cheerful haste to comply.

"Do you think thar's an opening in the city for a first-class place, liquors and a leetle faro?"

"Big!" responded Bowers.

"Go for it ag'in," and Brown pushed the bottle nearer Bowers.

The bumper's eyes, for an instant, flashed with a quick intelligence; he now understood the game of the wily sharp, who was throwing away whisky worth, at the lowest estimate, ten dollars a gallon. Bowers comprehended that the sagacious Mr. Brown wanted him to talk, and thought that by filling the old toper with whisky the end might be accomplished.

But Brown, with all his craft, was not aware of two things; first, that the bumper had drank so much vile liquor, that it took about a quart of the strongest whisky to affect him in the least; and second, that no matter how unsteady he might get in the legs, all the liquor in the world would not affect his brain a particle.

"You think it would pay?" Brown questioned.

"Splendid! Corral all the dust in town—a first-class shebang," the bumper replied, his tongue seeming to get thick.

"I shall want a good man to run the bar," Brown insinuated.

"I'm yer man!" cried Bowers, helping himself from the bottle, this time without invitation. "I kin stand on my head and sell more lickar than any four-legged man in Montana!" Then Mr. Bowers took still another drink.

"You've had experience in keeping bar, eh?"

"Practiced more at the bar than any lawyer in the State, ole pard!" vociferated Joe, now apparently very much under the influence of liquor.

"Let me see; didn't you used to keep a saloon in Harrodsburg?" asked Brown, quietly.

"Har—Harrods—what?" muttered Bowers, swaying very unsteadily in his chair.

"Harrodsburg, Kentucky."

"Kentucky—bully whisky—Kentucky!" murmured Bowers, seemingly about to go to sleep.

"Yes, you used to live at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, didn't you? Your name is—"

"Bowers—ole Joe Bowers."

"Yes, but at Harrodsburg—"

"Never thar—all my life."

"You told me you were."

"Lied, ole pard," and with this candid confession Bowers tumbled to the ground, and, curling himself up, went to sleep, while the baffled Mr. Brown surveyed him with intense disgust.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE CHIEF OF POLICE.

SHEPARD BLUM, chief of police of the city of Cinnabar sat in his office.

It was the morning following the night which had witnessed the death of the English bruiser by the terrible blow of the long-haired Cherokee.

Shep Blum, as he was commonly termed, was a lurchy, overgrown man of forty, or thereabouts, with a weather-beaten face and a huge brown beard.

Although Blum was the head and front of the police force of the gay young metropolis of the North-west, as the men of Cinnabar were fond of terming their city by the side of the swift-flowing Shasta, yet there were people base enough in the town to assert that if the old proverb of "set a thief to catch a thief" was Gospel truth, then Cinnabar City could not have chosen a better man to look after the law-breakers; in fact, to speak by the card, they said bluntly that a bigger rascal than the redoubtable Shep never set foot in the Shasta valley.

Perhaps this was only envy, though, for the best of men in public stations are abused and vilified at times. In fact, in this, our free and enlightened republic, if a man wants to learn what a horrible villain he truly is in the eyes of a great portion of the public, just let him run for an office, and if he doesn't succeed in having his little failings exposed, then it will be because there ain't any independent newspaper handy.

But big a rogue as he was, even his enemies confessed that Blum made a very good police officer; not that he ever prevented any terrible crimes or arrested any desperate offenders, but just let a guileless miner wander into the town some Saturday night, fill himself chock up with Cinnabar fire-water and proclaim himself lord of the causeway, then would "Shep," at the head of his trusty cohort, sally forth, surround the youth of uncertain footing and halting speech, and straightway lug him off to durance vile, there to linger until he appeased the manes of an outraged justice by forking over five dollars or ten—as the case might be.

For arresting a harmless drunken man Blum wouldn't take a back-seat for any man in California; but if the disturber of the public peace happened to be some desperado, who boasted "a man for breakfast every morning," then the daring Shep always took time to consider the matter and resolve whether it wouldn't be just as well to let the man get out of town, and not put the city to the expense of providing him with board and lodging.

The wary Shep was from New York, and he fully understood that in cases where desperate men were concerned, or great criminals, it was often more money in one's pocket to follow the example of the Godless Justice, and be a little blind, or at any rate not to be too far-sighted, than to possess the eyes of an Argus.

The worthy chief of police had just finished his breakfast—he boarded at the Occidental—and he was leisurely engaged in enjoying his morning smoke.

Blum was a plain man, with no nonsense about him, and so he pulled at a short clay pipe instead of the rolled combination of dried cabbage, playfully denominated a pure Havana cigar.

Cigars ranged from twenty-five cents upward in Cinnabar, at the time of which we write.

The meditations of the police captain were abruptly disturbed by the opening of the door and the entrance of four men into his sanctum.

First came the Clear-grit Sharp, the cool and collected Mr. Brown, then the Irishman, Shannon, the Mexican, Velarde, and last, though not least, the fat and greasy bumper, the original old Joe Bowers, brought up the rear.

In fine, it was the acute "Sharp" and his whole "army."

Blum rose to his feet in some little alarm. At first the thought occurred to him that this invasion boded personal harm to him, for half a dozen times at least he had extended the hospitalities of the calaboose to both Shannon and Velarde, and as for Joe Bowers, he had had his eyes upon that worthy stranger for some time, eager to get a chance to induce him to contribute a trifle to enrich the coffers of the good town of Cinnabar.

"Good-morning," said Mr. Brown, blandly, and the captain of police, at once relieved of his fears by the friendliness of the speaker's tone, politely requested the visitors to be seated.

The young metropolis had not beggared its treasury in furnishing the apartment of its chief police officer; for all the furniture that the office could boast was three chairs and a small desk.

Mr. Brown took one chair, the Mexican slid into another, while Blum took the third, which was placed behind the desk.

"Thank you, my noble dook!" exclaimed Bowers, with a dignified wave of his fat and dirty paw, as he braced himself up against the door. "I really do not care to squat-a-vo-o-la, as I onc't heerd a noble frog-eater remark; like the gal at the ball, I hev' sot an' sot, till I thought I should take root."

"I don't feel tired meself, begob," Shannon remarked, taking a position by the side of the bumper.

"To proceed to business," remarked the Clear-grit Sharp, clearing the decks for action at once, to use a nautical phrase. "If I am correct, you run the police force of this hyer city of Cinnabar?"

"You bet!" cried Bowers, suddenly, replying to the question before the worthy Blum could open his mouth. "Hev' I not seen that noble figger come scatterin' down the street when some rash galoot put on his war-paint and reckoned he could run this hyer town of Cinnabar? Hev' I not seen him snatch the warlike youth bald-headed, and whirl him inter the calaboose afore he could howl out that his name was Jack Robingson, which it wasn't? Oh! I could fold him to my buzzum and weep!"

The captain of police bowed at the compliment, and the ingenious Joe whispered to Shannon that he reckoned he could strike the official for the loan of a dollar before the day was out.

"Yes, sir, I kinder reckon that I run the police machine in this hyer town," Blum said.

"I'd like to see the man that sed you didn't!" cried Bowers, warmly. "Fight I kin not till my nose is pulled and my ears are slapped, but if any man sed that you didn't run the machine—an' run it fur all it was worth, too—I'll jes' warm him!"

Again the captain bowed, and Bowers mentally resolved that he would "strike" for two dollars instead of one.

"You heard of that little fuss, last night?" Brown asked.

"Which one?" Blum questioned.

Cinnabar City would have belied its reputation if it had not produced more than one fight to the hours of darkness.

"I mean the killing of the Englishman, last night, by Cherokee."

"Oh, yes, I heard something about the affair," the chief of police remarked.

"The Englishman was killed by Cherokee," Brown observed.

"An' that long-haired Cherokee is jes' ole p'ison, I tell you!" Bowers ejaculated. "In '55 in Susanville he run the town."

"An' it's not this town he'll run, a-hagur, an' this gentleman to the fore," Shannon remarked.

"Take it easy, old pard," Bowers said to his compatriot, in an undertone. "Don't lay it on too thick. We can both 'strike' him!"

The Irishman had bowed politely to Blum, upon uttering the flattering remark, and the keen-witted bumper instantly suspected that the wily son of the Emerald Isle was endeavoring to trump his trick.

"Yes, they had a fight behind the jail, didn't they?" Blum asked.

"Correct!"

And then the redoubtable bumper "put in his oar" again to use the cant phrase.

"They gouged an' fit an' in the mud they rolled, an' neither one stopped till the English cuss war cold!" Mr. Bowers was dipping into poetry.

"If I heard the thing right, Cherokee hit Ball a regular sockdolager."

"I could have heerd the smack of it ef I had been on top of Shasta!" Bowers declared.

"That's so, bedad!" the Irishman affirmed.

"Caramba! it was like the kick of a mule!" the Mexican exclaimed.

"This Cherokee has always been a quiet sort of a fellow," the chief of police observed, in a reflective sort of way. "Never made no trouble 'bout the town nor bin in the calaboose."

"Well, what do you propose to do about this thing?" the Clear-grit Sharp asked, abruptly.

Blum stared at the question.

"I don't kinder understand what you are driving at," he said.

The worthy chief was indeed puzzled; why any one should trouble themselves about such a simple matter was a mystery to him.

"Why, the man's dead!" Mr. Brown exclaimed, apparently astonished that the official was not more interested in the matter.

"Never was a poor galoot more slewed or worse!" Bowers declared. The bumper was never so happy as when he had a chance to air his opinions.

"Well, I know the man's dead, but what has that got to do about it?" Blum asked.

"But ain't you going to take some steps to punish his murderer?" Brown asked, in a tone that evidently implied that he thought that Cherokee ought to have been arrested, tried and condemned long ago.

"Do you want the spirit of that slewed cuss to haunt your midnight dreams an' make you feel wuss than ef you had gone to bed without h'istin' in

any cocktail or a swaller of gentle benzine?" Bowers demanded.

"Bad 'cess to the likes of him!" Shannon cried, indignantly; "is it kill a man he can an' walk off as aisy as a fox wid two tails?"

"It was murder; why not hang him?" Velarde questioned.

Then for the first time the sagacious chief of police began to get an idea of the nature of the business that the "army" had with him. All four were friends of the dead man, and they had called upon him to demand vengeance.

"Well, gents," he said, slowly, "as far as I've heerd about the affair, it was a fair fight, and the Englishman provoked the fuss."

"No, sir!" Brown exclaimed, indignantly.

"That poor harmless galoot abuse any man!" the bumper exclaimed, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Why, isn't that a fact?" Blum asked, but he knew perfectly well that it was when he put the question; he wanted to draw his visitors out. The Clear-grit Sharp had the reputation of being an extremely practical man, and, somehow, the captain of police had got it into his head that there was money in the affair, and, to do the worthy chief full justice, like other policemen, he was not averse to turning an honest penny when the occasion offered.

"No, sir, I was a witness to the entire trouble. My esteemed friend ordered a Welsh rabbit in the Occidental saloon, and when the dish came this Cherokee claimed that it was his—"

"Never in all my born days did I see a cuss lie so!" Bowers declared, interrupting the Sharp. "It makes me weep now when I goes back an' think on to it, jes' as if I had bin peelin' onions!"

"And then this Cherokee took an unfair advantage of Mr. Ball, stuffed the rabbit into his mouth, and then knocked him down with the plate."

"Oh, what a fall was thar, me countrymen!" Mr. Joe Bowers sighed.

"And then they went to settle the quarrel, and Cherokee killed Mr. Ball."

"Seems to me that I heerd some one say that the doctor sed that it was heart-disease, an' not the lick," Blum observed, thoughtfully.

"Bah! what does that fellow know about it?" Brown cried, scornfully. He referred to the amiable Doc.

"A more ignorant galoot never stood upon two legs!" Bowers exclaimed. "Oh, s'help, old pard, he ain't fit to tend a sick mule."

"Cherokee war arrested by the sheriff an' then bailed out, wasn't he?" the chief said.

"Of course, but there's the point!" Brown cried, quickly. "Who gave the sheriff any power in the affair? You're the chief of police of this hyer town, ain't you?"

"In course!" exclaimed Bowers, violently. "I'd like to see the man that sed he wasn't! Whar is he? let me rend him limb from limb an' strew the churchyard with his hungry bones!"

"You're the man to arrest Cherokee," Brown continued; "but I reckon that you don't want to interfere. In fact, I'm open to bet you twenty-five dollars to one that you don't dare to arrest Cherokee!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE MUSIC THAT CHARMS.

Now this was talking business, and the chief went for the offer there and then.

"Who says that I'm skeered to arrest him?" he exclaimed.

"I'll lay you twenty-five dollars to one that you don't!" Brown repeated, confidently.

"An' ef you want a reliable man to hold the stakes the old original Joe Bowers is the galoot for your money!" the bumper said, impressively.

"I'm open to take that bet!" the official said, "but I reckon that I can't do much in the matter even after I nab my man."

The wily rascal was anxious for the Clear-grit Sharp to proceed still further in the business. He guessed that there was more money in the background.

Little there was to be gained by simply arresting Cherokee and then releasing him, and Blum knew perfectly well that he could hardly hope to punish the long-haired gentleman for the fatal result of a chance blow, struck with no deadly intent; and even if the two men had fought with deadly weapons and the same result had been produced, to punish one man for simply defending his life in a free fight would be impossible in the civilized East, let alone amid the gold and silver-laden mountains of the Pacific slope.

What purpose then could be gained by arresting Cherokee.

Mr. Brown at once proceeded to develop his idea. "You can arrest him and have an examination; there's four witnesses of the whole affair from beginning to end in this room, and we will swear that all the blame lies at Cherokee's door. On the strength of our evidence you can easily decide to hold the man in custody, then you just send him down to the calaboose to wait his regular trial."

"But isn't he already under bail?" Blum inquired. As yet he was in the dark. He knew that the Clear-grit Sharp was a man of sense, and as a sensible man must know that even if he succeeded in getting Cherokee locked up, he most surely would be discharged the moment a trial could be had, and small satisfaction it seemed to him to shut the long-haired sport up in the jail for a few days.

"What difference does that make?" Brown inquired, in contempt. "What is it to you what the sheriff has done in the case? You're chief of the police, and there's been a man killed in the town; you know the man that killed him and it's your business to arrest him. Anyway, if you arrest him, you'll be twenty-five dollars in pocket by the leetle operation. I'll put the money right up in your hands now," and Brown drew two gold-pieces from his wallet.

The eyes of the police officer glistened as he caught the glitter of the coins.

"Better lemme hold 'em fur you, ole pard," suggested Mr. Bowers; "ef you should happen to lose 'em you'd never be able to forgive yourself."

Blum paid no attention to this remark; he was busy devising a way to make another "raise" of the liberal-minded Mr. Brown.

"To arrest the man will be easy enough," the

chief of police observed, slowly, "but it won't be so very easy to hold him."

"Why not?" Brown demanded, "what is to hinder you? You ain't responsible to anybody just now. Waite has resigned the mayorship and there's no new election yet. Jimmy Doyle, the alderman of the First ward, is acting mayor, and Jimmy ain't apt to interfere much in anybody's business. You jest say to him that you're running the thing according to law and he won't be apt to dispute it."

"But a writ will snake him out of jail quicker'n a wink," Blum suggested.

"Habeas Corpus, eh?"

"Yes, a writ of *habeas corpus* would take him out in spite of me."

"But who is going to issue that writ?" Brown questioned, shrewdly. "There's no judge nearer than Yreka, and it will take two or three days to get it from there."

"Oh, I thought that your idea was to keep him in the jail until his trial came on." The chief of police was quite in the dark as to the object that the Clear-grit Sharp expected to gain by locking up the mild-mannered son of fortune in the classic precincts of the calaboose, but he began to perceive that he could very easily oblige Brown in the matter, and he made up his mind to do so—for a consideration.

"It will be a heap of trouble to me to git Cherokee into the jail," he observed, slowly, and he glanced askance at Brown as he spoke.

The Sharp was extremely clear-sighted, and he understood at once what the worthy official was driving at.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," he said briskly. "I'll jest bet you twenty-five dollars to one that you don't jail Cherokee, and I'll put the money for both bets up in your hands in advance so that you'll be sure of corraling the stakes if you win."

"Better lemme hold 'em, ole pard," Mr. Bowers ejaculated; "you'll never worry 'bout 'em a mite ef you let me hold 'em."

"An' who'll hold you, me laddy-buck?" Shannon questioned, in an undertone.

"Oh, that's too old," the bummer replied, in a tone of disgust; "say somethin' fresh or else keep your 'tater-trap closed. I've heerd that more'n fifty times!"

Brown took more gold-pieces from his pocket, and he jingled the coins together in the hollow of his hand.

Talk about music! ah! what to human ears is most entrancing? the melody of the thrilling voice, the "voluptuous swell" of orchestral music, or the chink of gold?

A hundred to one—if not a thousand—in favor of the latter.

"Pony up!" said the chief of police, laconically. It was plain that he intended to win both bets if such a thing was possible, and what could happen to prevent it?

That was exactly the question that the sagacious officer put unto himself, and as in his own mind he was fully satisfied that he could accomplish the tasks, he looked upon the fifty dollars as his property already, and might easily earned at that, too.

"Well, I might as well go for my man first as last," he replied, briskly. "S'pose you wait hyer until I come back with him, and then you can prefer the charge, and I can start him off to the calaboose the moment the examination is over."

"Perhaps he'll be ugly," Brown suggested.

"Oh, I ain't afeard of that," Blum replied; "I'll take three men with me and I reckon he'll go quiet enough. They don't fool with me now, much, you bet!"

From the confident manner in which the chief of police volunteered this information it was plain that if modesty had been a crime, Shep Blum, Esquire, would have had no occasion to be alarmed.

The official departed, leaving the four men in charge of the premises, and they at once proceeded to make themselves comfortable until his return.

Not one of the three was in the confidence of their leader, and vaguely they speculated as to the reason why Brown should wish to thrust Cherokee into the jail from which he must surely emerge in a day or two.

Brown kept his own counsel, but he had a well-defined plan in his head for all that.

He doubted the Mexican's ability to compass the death of Cherokee, but if he could shut his foe up in the jail, then perhaps he might be able to raise a force of desperate characters and call upon Judge Lynch to do justice in the streets of Cinnabar.

Ten or fifteen men could easily storm the jail, and then Cherokee, helpless, would fall into his hands and a single pistol-shot put an end to the deadly feud.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MOUSE AND THE LION OVER AGAIN.

BLUM assembled his army, three men all told, the entire police force of Cinnabar City, and immediately proceeded to search for the long-haired sport.

As Cherokee had often remarked, it was not a difficult matter to find him if he was wanted, and so in front of the Occidental they came across the object of their search.

Cherokee had a slight acquaintance with the captain of police, and naturally he nodded to him when Blum came up.

"Good-mornin'; I was just a-huntin' you," the official remarked.

The observation led the long-haired gentleman to suspect that something was in the wind; the more so because the three policemen with Blum "kinder scattered" themselves around him as if to cut off his escape if he should attempt to flee.

But as Cherokee felt perfectly sure that he had not committed any offense against the peace of the town of Cinnabar that could by any possibility have come to the ears of the burly captain of police, he felt perfectly easy in his mind.

"I'm here," Cherokee replied, pleasantly.

"If you'll jest trot along down to my office I'll fix the thing up in a jiffy," Blum said, carelessly, just as if it wasn't going to be much of a shower after all.

"Certainly."

And the whole party proceeded down the street.

"What's up, anyway?" Cherokee inquired.

"Oh, that little fuss last night."

"But I'm under bail now for that."

"Yes, I know it, but I'm chief of the police in this

hyer town, an', of course, I must take some notice of a trouble like that difficulty last night, because ef I didn't the people would say that I wasn't worth shucks as a chief of police."

After this explanation Cherokee at once fell into the error of thinking his arrest was only due to a little bit of local pride on the part of the police official, he being desirous of showing his authority, and that after a farce of an examination was gone through with he would be discharged and there the matter would end.

Therefore he went along quietly enough.

The procession of the four police officers with Cherokee in their center down the main street of the town of course attracted instant attention, and soon the rumor flew through the town—carried on the wings of the wind, as it were—that Cherokee was again under arrest.

Now as there wasn't fifty people in the town that thought Cherokee to be in the wrong in the quarrel, the report, naturally, created considerable excitement.

By the time that the procession reached the door of the police-office there was quite a little crowd gathered together.

Clint MacAlpine, Sandy Rocks and Judge Candy, "the three inseparables," as the party was commonly termed, were in the post-office, busily engaged in discussing the affairs of the nation, as was usual with them about that time of the morning, and when they beheld the crowd coming they instantly ran over to see what the matter was; great was their astonishment then when they beheld Cherokee in charge of Chief Blum, and were informed by that worthy that he had arrested the long-haired sport on account of the trouble that had resulted in the death of the Englishman the night before.

"See hyer, you've got no right to arrest him!" Judge Candy exclaimed, indignantly. It angered him to see the police official attempt to override the law which already held Cherokee in its clutches.

"I reckon I know my business, Judge," Blum said, gruffly. He didn't like the Judge's interference.

"It's plain that you don't know the law," the Judge retorted, "or else you would know that you can't arrest a man on a charge upon which he has been already examined and has given bail to answer."

"I reckon that ef I go ag'in' the law that it's my concern," the official replied.

"I'll just take care of this for you, Cherokee!" the Judge exclaimed. "It will be lucky for you, Blum, if this thing don't cost you a cool thousand dollars as damages for false imprisonment."

But the chief of police considered a bird in the hand worth two in the bush; he was just going to rake in that fifty dollars that the Clear-grit Sharp had so boldly planked up, and let the future take care of itself. The new Mayor might remove him from his position anyway, so it didn't matter much.

The officers with the prisoner entered the office and the crowd followed.

Hardly had they squeezed through the door when there was another commotion in the street.

A huge, red-shirted red-bearded giant, followed by three or four miners came rushing up the road.

"Goin' to be jugged 'cos he laid out the galoot that stole his hash—the hash of a free American citizen? Oh! jackass-rabbits and yaller wild-cats! I'll quit an' be a 'web-foot' in Oregon!"

Possibly it is hardly necessary to inform the reader that it was the man-from-Red-Dog who thus expressed his sentiments.

Dandy Jim and his companions had just risen from their bunks—they had been dancing Indian war-dances up and down the main street of Cinnabar the night before until the moon had faded and the stars had grown dim in the sky—and were arranging their toilets by the bank of the river when the news of Cherokee's arrest reached them.

The man-from-Red-Dog had been deeply excited over the matter at the time of the trouble, and rightly conjecturing that the Clear-grit Sharp and his "army" were mixed up in the affair, he panted earnestly to have one of them, or two of them—Dandy Jim felt equal to any two in the party—just slap his face—or pull his hair—or call him a Chinaman, or insult him in some other direful way so that he could have a fair chance to take their scalps.

When Dandy Jim and his crowd reached the door, there was such a throng gathered in the passage, that they were wedged fast in the doorway.

The man-from-Red-Dog was equal to the situation though. He gathered his crowd together and all made a solid rush for the door, and the result was, they went in, and as they did so, the throng within, yielding to the pressure, forced Chief Blum and his desk half way out of the window behind him.

Order was restored at last and the examination commenced.

Cherokee, upon entering the room and beholding the Clear-grit Sharp accompanied by his followers, understood at once who had set the chief of police upon his track.

A quiet smile came over his face as he reflected that the time would soon come when instead of parrying blows he should deal one.

One by one Brown and his gang swore the assault and murder upon Cherokee. According to their testimony, the Englishman had always been the most lamb-like and peaceful of men, and the quarrel had been forced upon him entirely against his will.

And then Judge Candy, as counsel for the prisoner, demanded "a show for his money."

Half a dozen witnesses swore stoutly in Cherokee's favor, telling really the truth about the affair.

Blum heard both sides with the gravity of a judge, and then gravely announced that he thought that there was sufficient grounds to warrant holding the prisoner, and therefore he should consign him to jail until his case could be properly tried.

"No bail," he replied in answer to Judge Candy's indignant question.

Off to the jail then went prisoner and officers, witnesses and spectators.

The jailer was both astonished and indignant when Cherokee was delivered into his hands and Blum informed him that he—the jailer—was now responsible for the prisoner.

"He kill that man—an' I see'd the hull thing!" cried the jailer, in disgust; "an' didn't Doc say that the cuss died of heart-disease—an' don't Doc know? Is thar a smarter hoss-thief in Northern Californy?"

Nary one! You git, Cherokee, nary key will this child turn on you!"

The crowd gave the jailer three cheers and Cherokee walked off with his friends. Again Brown's plans had failed.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE MEETING.

THE first gleam of the morning sun was shining down upon the bosom of the Shasta.

Amid the cold gray rocks and the dark green branches of the pines sat a motionless figure, wrapped in a red blanket.

It was the chief of the Blackfoot tribe, and he waited for the coming of the long-bearded Cherokee.

Beneath the spreading branches of the pines the Indian had passed the night; the hollow impress of his stalwart form was yet visible in the soft earth.

Wrapped closely in his blanket, as if he dreaded the soft, balmy breeze of the spring morning, the savage waited with all the patience of his race.

Prompt though to his appointment was the ever punctual Cherokee, and the Indian peeped out from under cover of the tattered cloak, when he heard the clear ring of the white's footsteps upon the path by the river, like a turtle thrusting his head from his shell.

Rapidly Cherokee came on, until at last he halted opposite to the savage.

Casting aside the blanket, the brave rose to his feet, and with a guttural "Ugh!" welcomed the white man.

"I am here, you see," Cherokee said.

"The chief knew that his brother would come," the Indian replied, with stately dignity.

Cherokee cast a glance around him as if to assure himself that there were no listeners at hand.

The savage understood the meaning of the glance, and hastened to reassure the white.

"Let my brother speak," he said; "only earth, sky and the Blackfoot chief will hear the words of the pale chief."

Cherokee stepped forward and extended his hand to the Indian.

"Old friend, I am glad to see you!" he exclaimed, impulsively. "As glad as the earth is to see the sun when the night is past."

A strong tremor shook the massive form of the red-man for a moment, as he clasped the white hand of the long-bearded Cherokee within his own huge palm.

"O-wa-he speaks with a straight tongue when he tells his white brother that for many moons he has traveled to the setting sun, leaving the chiefs of his nation far behind, that he might once again talk to his friend."

"I could not deceive your sharp eyes," Cherokee said, slowly.

"Mud-turtle know great poker chief too well," the savage replied, with becoming gravity. "The heart of the red-man was sad when his brother said he did not know him."

"Sit down, and I will explain."

Then beneath the spreading branches of a pine the two sat down upon a couple of bowlders, face to face.

"It is many moons since we have seen each other," Cherokee premised.

"The memory of the Indian, like the branches of the pines, grows larger as time grows old," the savage said, with true Indian terseness. "The white chief took his black-eyed squaw and traveled to the sunset. O-wa-he went back to his tribe, but he found that he no longer cared for the people of his nation: he wanted his white brother so he bid good-bye to the land of the Blackfeet, and patiently as the beaver, he sought for his white friend. When he found him, the moccasins of the red chief were worn out, his feet were sore; but not so sore as the heart of the Blackfoot warrior when his white brother said he that he did not know him."

A grave and earnest look came over the face of the stern and stolid Cherokee, as he listened to the plaintive words of the red-man.

"Let my brother listen, and then he will understand why the memory is sometimes bad," Cherokee said.

"When the white chief parted from the valley of the Wisdom, he had a squaw—he had many little bags of gold-dust. He came at last to the Shasta country; with brother whites he found a valley where the gold was rich in the rocks, and in the sand. He built him a wigwam and settled down. Then came snakes of his own tribe, white like himself. The snakes wanted the wigwam and the squaw of the white chief. In time they got both, but the squaw was dead, and the wigwam was in ashes. Then the white chief swore that he would take the war-path against the snakes who had ruined all his life, not a war-path for a moon, or for two, or three, but an eternal war-path that should last until the hour should come when the warrior's death-song must burst from his lips. He joined the red-men and fought against the braves of his own race. Blood was shed like water; yonder village, where the wigwam of the white chief had been, was destroyed. But the blue-coated chief came; the red-men were determined: the white chief, who had led them on, was thought to be dead, too, but, like the fox, he hid in the rocks and escaped. Again the white men settled in the valley. What could one avenger do against a host? Nothing except by cunning. The lonely white man whose heart was bitter against his own people went away. He let his hair and his beard grow, called himself by another name, and came back and dwelt with the very men whom he had sworn to destroy. He wished to drive the settlers from the valley, but he found that the task was like emptying the Shasta river with a hollow shell. He is every man's foe; every man's hand is against him. One day he will be obliged to sing his death-song, for he cannot always succeed. He knew his red brother the instant that he saw him, but he does not wish to drag the Blackfoot chief to death with him."

The chief listened to the long explanation with grave attention, but upon his stolid face there could not be perceived the slightest sign of emotion.

For a few moments the savage appeared to be pondering upon some difficult question, then he rose to his feet, and pounded his broad chest with his fist for a second.

"O-wa-he was a great chief. Many moons ago he lived his lodge with the scalps of his enemies, but

now he is old, he cannot fight—he can only die. His white brother does not think that the red-man is worthy to be his friend any more—he goes back on him—he says that the red chief is a fraud, and cannot ante in this deal; but O-wa-he will die like a Blackfoot brave; he no break 'bank,' he make dealer heap uneasy."

Cherokee understood the Indian nature so well that he saw the savage contemplated some desperate deed.

"What will my brother do?" he asked.

"White men in wigwags there abuse the red-man's friend," and the chief pointed as he spoke to where the smoke was curling up on the air from the metropolis of the Shasta valley; "O-wa-he go run a muck—kill some, mebbe get killed himself!"

Cherokee understood that it was no idle boast.

"Why should my red brother do this?" he exclaimed.

"Injun no fit to be white man's brother, but he fit to die!" the savage replied.

Cherokee's face became very grave, and he rose to his feet.

"You have fully resolved to do this?" he said.

"Mud-turtle or O-wa-he—drunken Injun scamp, or the great warrior of the Blackfeet, never lie to his white brother!" exclaimed the savage.

"My path leads certainly to death!" Cherokee cried, in warning.

"What path leads any other place?" the Indian asked.

"I have sworn an oath to be revenged for the wrong that has been done me; every white man that settles in this valley is my foe; the wealth they forced from me shall never be enjoyed by mortal man. I would not drag you into my quarrel, therefore why not be as strangers to each other?"

"O-wa-he is not a water-rat!" the chief exclaimed, proudly. "No water-blood in his veins. White brother hates the snakes in the lodges by the river; the red-man hates them, too. Let my brother decide. Shall red-man go kill at once, or shall he go with his white brother and fight when he fights?"

Silently Cherokee extended his hand, and assentily the Indian clasped it. The two men understood each other now; words were not necessary.

Together they bent their footsteps toward the town, arranging plans for the future as they walked on.

The stately Indian, brave as a lion and cunning as a fox, was no mean ally, even for a man of Cherokee's wonderful abilities.

CHAPTER XLIX.

UGLY'S PROPOSAL.

WHILE Cherokee and the Indian were slowly proceeding back to the town, the early risers of the Occidental Hotel were being considerably astonished.

Old Joe Ugly had suddenly made his appearance, and was inquiring anxiously for the long-haired sport.

"Any gentleman seen anything of Cherokee?" he inquired.

Never before since old Joe's occupation of the wing-dam shanty had he been known to visit the town in the morning, and the hotel boarders, anxiously waiting for their breakfasts and comforting the inner man with the appetizing "cocktail," were considerably puzzled as to the reason of Ugly's wish to interview the genial Cherokee.

So the inquiring Ugly was duly invited to "wet his whistle" and "h'ist in a cocktail," by the curious bystanders, and after this operation was duly performed, the old man was questioned as to what he wanted with Cherokee, in a quiet and civil way, by Judge Candy, who led the attack. Ugly replied, mysteriously, that it was very important business, and that it couldn't wait; then he darted out of the hotel and sought for Cherokee up and down the street, much to the astonishment of the Occidental sharps.

"Mebbe he's struck a rich 'lead'; Cherokee's his pardner now in the wing-dam claim," Billy King, the urbane barkeeper, suggested.

"More likely that he wants to strike Cherokee for a loan," replied Candy. "He was cavorting round hyer for ten dollars the other night."

And while the sports of the hotel were vaguely speculating as to Ugly's quest, and the old man was trotting up and down the street, bothering every one he met in regard to the whereabouts of his "pardner," Cherokee in person came down the road. He had parted with the Indian just outside the town.

Old Joe made a bee-line for his associate instant.

"Good-morning; you're jest the very man I want to see. Will you take something?" was old Ugly's greeting.

Cherokee was decidedly astonished. He had never known old Joe to extend such an invitation before, although the old man was always ready enough to accept liquor at anybody else's expense.

"No, thank you, I don't feel like it this morning."

"Better take something," persisted Ugly, coaxingly; "you don't look over and above well; there's nothing like a well-mixed cocktail to put a man's stomach in order. A cocktail before breakfast makes me feel like a gentleman. In this hyer country a man allers ought to h'ist in a little p'ison the first thing in the morning, to give a sort of tone to his stomach. Cherokee, you ought to look arter your health. I feel really concerned about you," and then the old fellow shook his head gravely.

Cherokee was decidedly astonished at both the old man's words and manner.

"What are you driving at, anyway?" the long-haired sharp demanded.

"Nothing but a natural interest in my partner," Ugly explained. "And speaking about partners, that reminds me that I want to see you about a little business connected with our mine."

"What is it?" asked Cherokee, shortly.

"Well, I can't explain very well here," Ugly said. "If you can spare the time, I'd like to have you take a walk out as far as the mine with me."

"Can't you explain here what you want?"

"Not very well, and if you haven't been to breakfast, why, you kin take a snack with me; I was in such a hurry to see you this morning that I came away without eating anything."

Cherokee remained silent for a moment, thinking over the old man's proposition.

"Come in and get a cup of coffee with me, and then I'll go with you," Cherokee said, at last, abruptly.

Old Joe agreed; so the two proceeded to the Occidental, got breakfast, and then started for the wing-dam shanty.

The solitary shanty upon the bank of the river was reached at last, and Ugly, choosing a shady spot down under the shadowy bank of the ruined dam, invited his guest to be seated.

He looked at the "claim" before him, then up at the sky and around at the trees.

"Say, Cherokee, what do you suppose I dig out of this hyer claim?" he said, pointing to the rifted sand at his feet.

"A heap of dirt," Cherokee answered, briefly.

"Some gold, too, you know."

"Mighty little."

"Tain't much, that's a fact," Ugly admitted; "but what else do you s'pose I get?"

"Tired," suggested the visitor.

"That's so, but what else?"

"I give it up—pass, partner."

"Ideas!" exclaimed the old man, impressively, and he laid his skinny forefinger upon Cherokee's knee as he spoke. "Ideas worth more than gold."

"What do you do with 'em?"

That was a difficult question and Ugly did not attempt to answer it.

"Whenever I get puzzled, I just come out here, take a dig or two at the bar and then I sit down to think. Now, Cherokee, there was a question came up the other day and I came out here and dug out the idea that you was the man to help me out."

Cherokee looked askance at the old man; he was fairly puzzled, but guessed that what was to come was not fated to be particularly pleasant to him.

"Cherokee, I have a daughter, my Nelly; you've seen her and know what she is. Now, partner, the point is here: s'pose one of the Cinnabar sharps comes after my girl; I won't say who it is; it may be Sandy Rocks, or Judge Candy, or Billy King, the barkeeper, for that has nothing to do with my trouble. Now, then, I know that the girl doesn't care anything for the man at all, but he acts like a gentleman. He says to me, Mr. Ugly, I know that luck has run against you; I know that you have had a hard time to get along; I want to do the square thing with you; so, if you'll give me your daughter I will make you a present of a thousand dollars. Now what do you say to that?"

"What will your daughter say?" Cherokee replied, answering one question by asking another.

"Oh, she'll do just as I say!" the old man exclaimed, confidently.

"Well, you had better take the offer then; I s'pose you want my advice on the subject."

"Yes, exactly," the old man admitted. "But now, here's another point. S'pose Nelly does have a sneaking notion after another chap—"

"But you said that she would do as you wished."

"Yes, of course she will, but she'll be apt to like the man I speak of even if she does as I tell her."

"So much the worse for the man that gets her."

"Now, Cherokee, you've acted fair and square with me, and I want to do the fair thing with you; and the old man assumed an appearance of great honesty. "You are the man that Nell likes. She never said so, mind you, but I know that it's a fact. I've seen a good deal of women in my time. Now, I ain't going to say to you, will you give a thousand dollars, because I'm offered that. No, sir; I want to give you a fair shake. I think, though, Cherokee, that it's only right that I should have something for the girl, don't you?"

"Undoubtedly; she's your property and you have the right to sell her to the highest bidder, only I would advise that you make a regular auction out of the affair—put her up, you know, like you would a horse, and knock her down to the man who is willing to give the most."

Old Ugly winced at the sarcasm.

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, but I'll tell you what I will do, Cherokee. You put up two thousand dollars against the girl and I'll play you a game of poker for her. If you win you're to have the girl and a thousand dollars of the stake. If I win I'll keep both."

CHAPTER L.

TWO PAIR.

CHEROKEE looked at the old man for a moment, as if for the purpose of seeing if he was perfectly in earnest. There was no doubt about the matter; Ugly was not joking.

"It seems to me, that offer is like the handle of a pump, all on one side."

"Why, you're sure to win," Ugly protested. "You always win!"

"But you've got a sure thing, anyway."

"Well, I ought to have something for her; you, yourself, admit that."

"But you are sure that the girl will be satisfied?" Cherokee asked.

"I know she will be, and if she ain't, why the whole thing is off, and you can have your money back; you needn't pay it until you know."

"It's a go, then!" decided Cherokee.

"Here's the papers," and the old man quickly drew a pack of well-worn cards from his pocket.

Cherokee glanced at the cards a little suspiciously. Old Ugly understood the meaning of the glance.

"Oh, it's all honest! I give you my word that the cards are all right."

Cherokee quietly took the cards and examined them; then, apparently satisfied, he shuffled them a little, and inquired:

"How is it to be, old man, a little draw, or a single hand?"

Old Joe reflected for a few minutes, and then resolved to stake all upon a single chance.

"Just a single hand, and the best show wins."

"We'll cut for deal, of course," said Cherokee, giving the cards a few more dexterous shuffles.

"You ought to allow me to deal, I think," old Ugly suggested, coaxingly.

"Not by a jug-full!" was Cherokee's reply.

"You've got the whole butt-end of the bargain already. There's your cards. Now cut 'em. If you had any money to lose, I'd lay you an even bet that I'll win the deal."

"I'm broke," the old gambler confessed, with a sigh. "If you'll trust, I'll go you an even twenty

on the turn, and you can take it out of the thousand."

"Make it five hundred instead of twenty, and it's a bargain."

"Five hundred!"

The temptation was too strong for the old man to resist.

"All right; five hundred even that I win the deal."

"Will you cut first?"

"No, you."

A turn of the wrist and Cherokee displayed the queen of spades.

A hollow groan came from old Ugly's lips. He did not believe that he could beat the queen.

"How's that for high, old man?" demanded Cherokee. "I'll go you a thousand to five hundred that you won't beat that."

Not even these tempting odds could induce old Ugly to invest.

"Oh, you have Satan's luck!" the desperate old gambler protested.

"Try yours, old man," said Cherokee, coolly.

Ugly's cut was a tray of hearts.

Cherokee laughed and Ugly swore.

"Now, partner!" the old fellow exclaimed, impressively, after his fit of passion was over, "play fair with me; no ringing in a cold deck, you know." "Square as a die, old man, for ducats!" and Cherokee's nimble fingers dealt off the cards.

With trembling and eager hands old Joe grabbed the painted pieces of pasteboard. Cherokee watched his face as he gathered up the cards, and soon saw from the expression that Ugly had got a good hand.

Then the long-bearded sharp took up his own cards, but whether he held four aces or nary pair would have puzzled a conjuror to have told, for it was not written on his face.

"Well?" said Cherokee, inquiringly.

"I think that I've got you!" Ugly decided, trembling in every limb with excitement.

"Maybe so. I'm tolerably strong, though," and Cherokee betrayed no anxiety.

"What have you got?"

"Two pair."

"Aha!" shouted Ugly, in glee. "I've got three of a kind—three ten-spots!" And in great joy the old man laid down the magic three.

"Mine are two pair of jacks," Cherokee remarked, placidly, and he laid down the four jacks by the side of the three tens.

Ugly howled in despair when he understood that Cherokee had played upon him the well-worn joke of calling four of a kind two pair.

"I owe you five hundred dollars and you owe me your daughter, Elinore," and Cherokee called the stakes.

"You'll find her in the shanty," Ugly remarked, still gazing blankly at the cards. "Tell her that I say that I am willing."

Cherokee rose to his feet.

"I reckon this is a forlorn hope, old man, but I'll try it."

The long-bearded sharp then strode away to the door of the shanty, leaving Ugly still gazing blankly upon the cards that had undone him, although he had come out of the game five hundred dollars richer. But what was that to a man who, had expected to make a thousand and keep his daughter, too, as a bait for some other love-sick individual.

Cherokee knocked at the shanty door, and when Elinore's voice bade him enter, he walked in.

The girl was seated by the table, her head reclining upon her hand.

Cherokee removed his hat, closed the door behind him, and stood motionless, gazing upon the girl.

As often as he had seen the tall and slender maiden never had she appeared so pretty as now.

"You have won?" she asked.

Cherokee was astonished.

"You knew your father's design?"

"Yes."

"And you are willing to abide by the result of chance?"

"Do you claim me?"

Cherokee took a sudden start forward, knelt by the girl's chair, and placed his strong arm around her slender waist.

"Give me a single sign that you are willing to go with me, and I will claim you against all the world!" he exclaimed, passionately.

A moment she gazed upon the earnest, upturned face of the son of fortune, her dark eyelashes half veiling the kindling eyes beneath.

"I have fought against liking you," she murmured, slowly, "but fate is stronger than I, and wills it otherwise. Do you know who and what my father is? He is a criminal from justice. The president of a bank, he betrayed his trust; first squandered the funds intrusted to his care; then, when he found that detection was certain, he fled like a thief in the night. Remember that at any time the officers of the law may seize upon him, and while he lives I cannot desert him."

"I honor a spirit like that!" and Cherokee spoke softly. "I, too, on my part, confess that I liked you from the moment my eyes first fell upon you. Like you, I resisted the impulse to love. I did not think myself worthy the love of any pure girl. I am a desperate, hunted man, skulking through the world under an assumed name. Bitter wrongs have I to redress, bitter foes to punish."

"Why not seek forgetfulness elsewhere?" she said, gently, bending down and touching his broad forehead with her soft lips. "Let my love make you forget the world's wrongs—forget revenge and all cruel passion."

Like one in a dream the iron-hearted Cherokee yielded to the soft influence of the most charming passion that earth doth know.

"Be it so," he said; "only one blow more, and then peace and rest."

CHAPTER LI.

PLAYING 'POSSUM.

"ONE more blow!" cried the long-haired Cherokee, as he parted from the lily-like Elinore.

With a lighter heart than he had carried in his bosom for many a long day, Cherokee left the wing-dam shanty.

Old Ugly was anxiously awaiting the result of the interview.

"Well—well?" cried the old man, nervously.

"It's all right!"

Ugly rubbed his skinny palms together in a glow of satisfaction. "And the money, partner?"

"Come in town to-night and you shall have it."

"Why wait?" he grumbled. "What difference does it make if you give me the money now?"

"None at all, old sport," Cherokee replied, pleasantly; "but I don't walk round with a small-sized fortune in my pockets. You can't have it before night. There will be plenty of time for you to lose it before twelve o'clock."

"You'll be at the Occidental by dark?"

"Yes, if I live."

Ugly watched him until he disappeared around the bend in the road; then, chuckling to himself in delight, old Joe went into the shanty.

Cherokee walked briskly on, strange thoughts in his mind.

"It is of no use to keep up the fight longer," he muttered. "Blood enough has been shed. Let me quit the game, and in another country begin a new life. I am sick of this land. No matter where I go, the bloody work seems to follow me. I'll go somewhere where murder is a crime, and not even self-defense can excuse the taking of life. I'll just settle this one little account, and after that I'll close the book forever."

As he strode rapidly along the lonely road, his well-trained eyes warned him of danger although the most searching glance could not have detected that there was a mortal near.

No human figure met the keen eyes, yet he was sure that within a little clump of timber, fifty paces or so along the road, a man was lying concealed.

A mother bird, frightened from her nest, was fluttering amid the tree-tops, and this convinced Cherokee that danger was at hand.

Upon the instant he halted.

Too late, apparently, for a little puff of smoke rose in the bush, and the hum of a ball sounded in the air.

Up went the hands of Cherokee convulsively, and he staggered and fell to his knees. With a desperate effort he drew a Derringer from his coat pocket; but, as if the effort had cost him dear, he rolled over on his side in the dust.

Then from the thicket, from whence the shot had been fired, rose a great shout of victory.

Forth into the road sprang the Mexican, Velarde.

"*Caramba!*" he cried in glee, thrusting the yet smoking pistol into his belt. "I've finished the job at the first trial! Now for his dust!"

But as the assassin ran toward the prostrate man a wonderful change took place.

The dead man came suddenly to life; the hand that grasped the Derringer was raised, and with an unerring aim sped a ball straight to the heart of the Mexican.

With a wild, convulsive shriek the assassin fell. For a moment he writhed and groaned and struggled, biting the dust in his agony, and then, as life departed, became statue-like, still.

Cherokee had risen to his feet. His device had succeeded; he had tricked the Mexican to his death. But he did not advance to the stricken man. He drew a revolver from his belt, drew back the hammer, and leveled the weapon at the little clump of timber whence the Mexican had come.

"Step out!" he said, sternly.

And at the word, out into the road came the bummer, Joe Bowers!

With a placid smile, the redoubtable Mr. Bowers confronted the menacing muzzle of the leveled revolver. He had extended his hands above his head, clear proof that he intended to make no defense.

"You did that bully!" Bowers exclaimed, in a tone of great admiration. "I never see'd any cuss popped off in better style. He thought he had you for sure, too. I reckon that you played that lone hand for all that it was worth."

"Got any prayers to say?" Cherokee asked, grimly.

"Reckon that I don't need to blow my Gospel horn just now, old pard," the bummer said, confidently. "I reckon that you won't plug the man that rung in a cold deal for you, the other night, at the Occidental."

"You are one of Brown's gang?"

"No-rect; but I jest foller him 'to serve my turn upon him, not for love and duty,' as that noble galoot, Iago, remarks," Bowers said, unblushingly.

Cherokee hesitated for a moment, then he finally lowered the revolver.

"Git!" he said, laconically.

"You bet!" Mr. Bowers replied, with equal brevity.

CHAPTER LII.

THE VENDETTA'S LAST ACT.

In the cave of the Clear-grit lode sat a gloomy party. At the head of the little table was the usually cool and quiet Mr. Brown, but now his face exhibited strong traces of nervous restlessness.

Close by Brown's right hand sat the bummer Bowers, his face solemn and woebegone. At the foot of the table sat Yuba and Shannon.

Bowers had just finished his relation of the death of the Mexican, Velarde. He was careful, however, to omit all reference to his short interview with the terrible Cherokee. He simply said that he was prospecting up the road and had sat down in the shade to rest, and so happened to witness the encounter.

A dead silence fell upon the little party when Bowers finished his recital, and the Clear-grit Sharp looked around upon his army.

"Well," Brown observed at last, finding that no one seemed inclined to speak, "I suppose we must draw lots again to see who will try this job next."

"If it's all the same to you, cap'n, I'll sell out," Bowers remarked. "I don't really hanker after the thing at all. Money ain't no object to me jest now. I'll resign in favor of my esteemed friend hyer, Yuba."

"I reckon that I don't want none of it," Yuba growled.

"Bad 'cess to the likes of me if I try it," muttered Shannon.

The Clear-grit Sharp showed his annoyance.

"You all take water, eh?" he said, sarcastically.

"And both of you back out?" addressing the two at the lower end of the table.

"Wa-al, I reckon that 'tain't no use to mince the matter," Yuba admitted. "I reckon that it ain't lucky for to run ag'in' this long-haired cuss."

Brown relapsed into a deep study, drumming idly with his fingers on the table. Shannon and Yuba gazed upward at the dark roof, while Bowers contemplated the tallow candle that burned upon the table. Night had just set in when the plotters came together.

"I have an idee!" cried Bowers, suddenly.

Brown looked up as though he was impatient at the interruption to his thoughts, but the bummer never heeded the angry look upon the face of the Clear-grit Sharp.

"I have a first-class idee—reg'lar furst chop," Bowers continued. "Two of our crowd have bin wiped out by this long-bearded galoot, an' as the rest on us know it, naturally, we don't care to tackle him, seeing as how we are not quite ready to pass in our checks yet. Now, s'pose we enlist some more fellers and set 'em at this hyer Cherokee? It looks like a big stake for a leetle job."

"Bully!" cried Yuba. "I know two or three that'll be apt to go for it."

"Better start out and secure them at once," Brown suggested. "Two will be enough."

Yuba at once rose to depart, and both Bowers and Shannon volunteered to accompany him.

The Clear-grit Sharp cautioned the gentle William to be careful to get good men, and the three departed, leaving Brown to his own meditations.

Not over and above pleasant did the wily Clear-grit Sharp feel as he reflected how fruitless had been his schemes so far to accomplish the death of the man he hated.

A footstep near the door startled him. Quick as the tiger, whom in his nature he resembled, Brown drew his revolver and sprung back the hammer. Not a second too quick was the action, for the next moment the terrible white rider, the Death Shot of Shasta, stood within the cave!

"Are you prepared to die?" cried the masked man, in a hoarse voice.

"Well, I reckon that you had better answer that question," Brown replied, "seeing that I have only to pull the trigger."

"Your weapon is harmless, Andrew Jackson Hardin," the white rider said, in his hoarse tones.

The Clear-grit sharp started; he had not believed it possible that any one could recognize him.

"The bullet of Richard Talbot did not kill you outright, I see, although it did disfigure your face. But now your hour has come. You shall die this time, and the Cinnabar massacre will be avenged."

"And you, Dick Talbot, Cherokee, or Shasta Death Shot, whatever you call yourself, you did not die as people thought," "Kentuck" cried, boldly. "We both live, and now, face to face, we'll settle the ownership of the Cinnabar mine. But one of us will ever leave this place alive!"

With a single movement, the masked man removed the white hood from his head, revealing the face of Cherokee.

As our readers have probably guessed, Injun Dick Talbot and Cherokee were one and the same.

Face to face the deadly enemies stood. The advantage apparently with Kentuck, for he held his revolver leveled full at Talbot's breast, while on the contrary, Dick's hands were level with his waist.

"Now that your time has come, let me tell you that I had resolved to hunt you down," Kentuck said, fiercely. "I knew that you were living, and I knew that you would come to this valley; and the moment I heard of the Shasta Death Shot I knew it was you, trying to frighten men away from the Cinnabar mine."

"Do you remember Harrodsburg, Kentucky?" asked Talbot, slowly; "do you remember the poor girl that you married there, and then deserted, after nearly killing her with your cruelty? She did die at last, and with her dying breath she called down Heaven's vengeance upon your guilty head. That girl had a brother, a worthless, drunken wretch. He swore to kill you, but lacked the courage to strike the blow, although he tracked you clean from Kentucky to the Pacific slope. But, if he could not play the lion, he could the mouse. Your weapon is harmless; you are delivered into my hands."

"Joe Bowers!" cried Kentuck, half-aghast, as he snapped the revolver.

The cap exploded, but the bullets of the cartridges had been removed!

With a wild yell, Kentuck turned as if to flee, but even as he turned the death shot came.

Down went the scarred man, struggling with death's agonies. Only a few moments of pain, and then the gambler's soul fled to meet its Judge.

Injun Dick Talbot had won the Cinnabar lode after all.

CHAPTER LIII.

ASHES TO ASHES.

TALBOT bent down to examine if life was extinct in the prostrate man, and hardly had he done so, when a warning cry from the lips of the Indian, whom he had left on guard with the horses without, told him that danger was nigh.

Hastily replacing the white hood over his head, Talbot rushed forth.

"I'll give them one last fright!" he cried, and then the Death Shot of Shasta will be seen no more."

A party of drunken miners had perceived the Indian in charge of the two horses, and had resolved to appropriate them.

Like a whirlwind the white rider dashed through the throng, scattering them to the right and left.

But as he sprung upon his horse—the milk-white steed—the sorrel patches were rudely painted over so as to disguise the animal, and make it appear like a pure white horse—three or four of the men recognized the well-known garb.

"The Death Shot!" they cried, and then they immediately drew their weapons, and began to blaze away at the now fast-flying fugitives.

The horsemen might have laughed at the impotent discharges, had not the sound of the firearms aroused the whole of the town, and caused the inhabitants to rush out into the street.

Urging their horses to their utmost speed, the two dashed rapidly through the city.

The darkness favored the desperate attempt, and the fugitives reached the outskirts of the town, without being even scratched, although a hundred balls had whizzed by them.

"A hundred yards more and we are safe!" Talbot muttered, between his firm-set teeth, but hardly had the words passed from his lips, when a well-directed

ball struck one of the hind legs of his horse, and pretty effectually crippled him.

Talbot felt the brute sink under him, and realizing what the trouble was, threw himself from the horse's back, and with another agile spring mounted behind the Indian, who had checked his horse at seeing Talbot's steed stumble.

The delay was a fatal one though, short as it was, for a fresh shower of bullets came whistling around the heads of the two, and the exclamation of pain that came from Talbot's lips told that he was hit.

The danger was over now too, for the fugitives soon gained the shelter of the thicket just beyond the town, turning from the main road into a little narrow path leading up to the rocky range.

The miners had given up the chase at the border of the town, and had returned to tell of the wonderful affair.

A half mile up on the mountain side was a narrow cave; it was the hiding-place of the mysterious Death Shot. There he kept his disguises, and the paint, wherewith he changed the appearance of his horse. A sorry-looking brute the mottled steed had been when ambling around the town, but when on the road, put upon his mettle, urged to his topmost speed, he seemed like another beast.

Talbot's arms were clasped tightly around the waist of the Indian, and every now and then a hollow moan of pain would escape from his lips.

At the cave the chief dismounted, and gently as a mother with her child, placed Talbot upon the pine-bough bed within the cave.

Kindling a fire in the natural fireplace, the Black-foot proceeded to examine the wound that Talbot had received.

Dark was the look that came over the face of the Indian as he bared the brawny breast, and looked upon the blood-stained mark.

"How feel?" asked the savage, pressing gently with his fingers the purple flesh near the wound.

"Like a man that is not long for this world," Talbot replied, feebly.

"My brother is right—the pale-faces have struck him hard," and the stern old Indian bowed his head.

Talbot became weaker and weaker; he could perceive that life was fleeting fast.

"The last time," he muttered; "that's so. I don't complain—blood will have blood; maybe it is better for this girl that she is spared from me; I might only drag her down to death like all the rest."

Then, for quite a time, Talbot remained silent, each breath costing him more and more exertion.

The Indian bent over him with a stolid face, more like a great bronzed statue than a human.

With a desperate effort, Talbot rallied his fleeting senses.

"Old friend," he said, faintly, gazing up into the face of the chief; "under this bed you will find some bags of gold-dust; take what you like for yourself, and the rest carry to the girl in the wing-dam shanty. Tell her I died, and ask her, as she loved me, to leave these scenes of lawlessness and return to her Eastern home."

"Mud-turtle take no dust—give all to squaw—if she stay here, fight for her, maybe."

"One last service, then, for you to do," Talbot murmured, faintly, feeling that the end was near.

"When I am dead, carry me to the top of Mount Shasta. At midnight kindle a fire, and in it place my body; ashes to ashes, and dust to dust at once. There, to the flames, I gave my dark-eyed Yuet-a! Oh! how many noble women have died for me!—Jinnie—John Rimee—oh, father!"

And then, all was still.

Soft and low, from the lips of the Indian, came the death-chant of his tribe, and he covered his head with his blanket, and humbled himself to the ground beside the body of the man whom he had loved with all a woman's fondness.

Old Ugly waited long that night at the Occidental Hotel, but the long-bearded Cherokee came not, and at last, at midnight, when the urbane bar-keeper, Billy King, turned him out of the saloon, the old man went home, in a terrible rage.

The first thing in the morning, Ugly started to town again, determined to find Cherokee.

Shortly after her father departed, Elinore was surprised by an Indian stalking gravely into the shanty. Tersely the chief told the story of Cherokee's death, and delivered the buck-skin bags of gold-dust. The girl listened like one in a maze, and before she could recover from her astonishment the savage had departed.

When her father returned she related what had occurred.

For once, a good thought came to the old man.

"You are rich!" he cried; "let us go back East and compromise my debts, and I will try to be a decent man!"

The night after the death of Talbot, the inhabitants of Cinnabar were roused from their slumbers by the intelligence that there was a great fire on Mount Shasta.

With the aid of a powerful glass, it was finally determined that a huge watch-fire was blazing on the side of Shasta, attended by a single Indian.

"Some of the buck's heathen ceremonies!" quoth the crowd.

Little did they dream that the mortal remains of the heroic Injun Dick were to be consumed to ashes on great Mount Shasta.

THE END.

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